THE SACRED PATHS OF THE WEST

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Chapter 6

Jewish Sacred Story and Historical Context

For a small but unique portion of people in the world today, the question of identity is linked with being Jewish. To be Jewish means in some way to be linked with the sacred story of the People of the Covenant.

The religion of Judaism has a long and complex history. Unlike both Christianity and Islam, which became full-formed religions within the generation of their founders, Judaism reached its classical form more than a millennium after the foundational sacred history associated with Moses and the covenant at Mt. Sinai. Through many vicissitudes during its long history, Judaism has developed and been transformed. Yet Judaism today still retains the essential characteristics it acquired as it was shaped during the Rabbinic period—it still is the "Way of Torah."

FOUNDATIONS OF THE JEWISH STORY

To simplify the complex history of Judaism, we may speak of two foundings: the founding of the *Israelite* religion under the leadership of **Moses**, and the founding of *Judaism* after the Babylonian exile, beginning under the leadership of Ezra and culminating in what is known as "Rabbinic Judaism." The religion of *Israel* is that known from the pages of the Hebrew bible, the **Tanakh**. The religion of *Judaism*, grown from the Israelite religion, reached final form in the teaching of the rabbis as set down in the **Talmud**. However, to Jewish thinking, the Israelite religion and the Jewish religion are not two religions but one and the same. And the full sacred writings of this one religion of the descendants of Abraham are contained in both the Tanakh and the Talmud.

Thanks to an enormous amount of scholarly investigation, both in archaeology and in the ancient texts, the history of the people of Israel within the world of the ancient Near East can be seen with a certain amount of clarity. That history, beginning with ancestors of the Israelites as semi-nomads on the fringes of the Arabian desert around 2000 B.C.E., is a remarkable story of an obscure tribe experiencing a moment of royal glory before fading from the world scene once more. Whereas the political history of Israel may have been relatively insignificant, its sacred history has been of momentous consequence for a good part of the human race. We can use the scholarly reconstruction of Israel's history to help in understanding, but most important is seeing the Jewish story as Jews themselves interpreted it.

Beginnings: Israel, People of the Covenant

According to the story, the people of Israel were created when YHWH (the special name of Israel's God, probably pronounced **Yahweh**), the God of their ancestors, heard their cries in slavery in Egypt and brought them out, taking them as a special people by making a covenant with them and giving them the **Torah** (law). This is the founding of the people of Israel. It should be noted that Jews of later times (and still today) adopted the practice of not pronouncing the sacred name Yahweh, substituting a word like Adonai (Lord) instead. We will use the name Yahweh in this part of the story to reflect the usage in ancient Israel.

Prologue: All Humankind and Abraham When the Israelite singers and scribes told their sacred stories, they reached far back, to the creation of the world and the early history of humankind. According to the first chapters of

Genesis, God created a good world and created humankind within it to take care of it and live the good life of serving God. But people turned away from God, following the evil inclination of their hearts. The first man and woman disobeyed God and were expelled from God's special garden; one of their sons (Cain) murdered the other (Abel) and was cursed to become a wanderer on the earth. Evil and violence filled the earth. When humans sought to glorify themselves by building a great tower to heaven, God confounded their languages and scattered them throughout the earth—and human history as we know it began.

This failure and scattering of humankind on earth, in spite of God's good intentions for them, set the stage for God's great plan of intervention in human history. The story introduces the family of Abraham. We know from archaeological material from ancient Mesopotamia that the stories about the clans of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fit into the general cultural milieu around the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. These clans were semi-nomadic herders on the fringes of the Arabian desert, caught up in the general movement of similar Semitic people from southern Mesopotamia toward Syria and the land of Palestine. But, according to the story, this particular movement was more than a mere land-seeking migration of clans; it was directed by Yahweh, the God of the later Israelites.

> Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Go forth from your own land, your kindred, and your father's house, to a land that I will show you, for I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make your name so great that there will be a blessing. Those who bless you I will bless, but I will curse those who curse you. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."
>
> (Genesis 12:1–3)

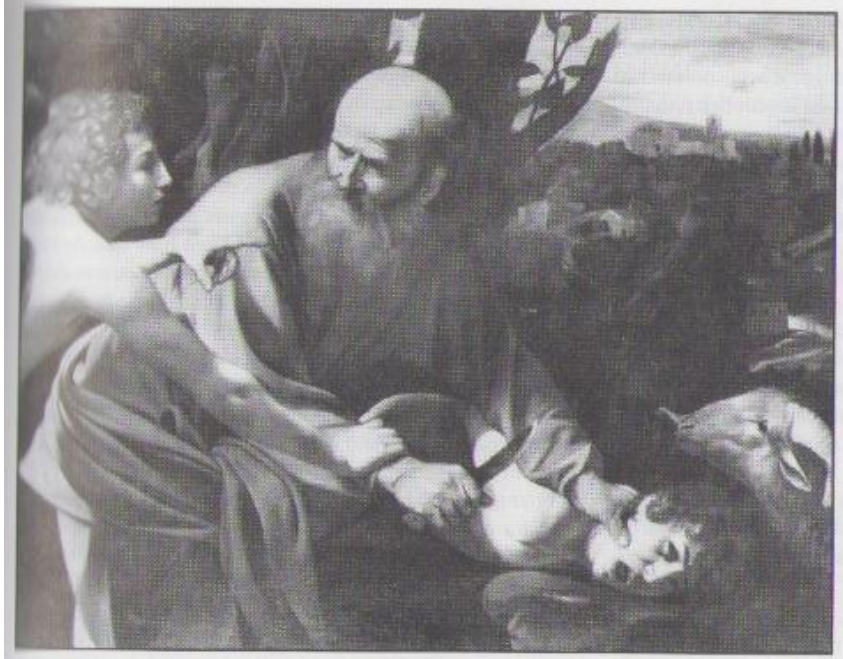
In this story, God took steps to initiate in human history a new design, focused on Abraham and Sarah and their descendants as a great nation with a land given to them by God, who would bring a blessing to all the families of the earth through them.

Abraham and the clans associated with him were pastoralists, wandering from pastureland to pastureland. Worship focused on the clan god, called "the God of Abraham." And they also built altars to the supreme God El, who was worshiped in different places under names such as El Elyon (Exalted God), El Roi (Seeing God), and El Shaddai (Mighty God). But in the view of the Israelite story, the God the ancestors worshiped was none other than Yahweh, the personal God of the Israelites (even though, according to the story, Yahweh revealed that name for the first time to Moses). God made a covenant with Abraham, giving him children in his old age. First Hagar, servant of his wife Sarah, bore him Ishmael, and then Isaac was born from Sarah, the ancestress of the people of Israel. As the sign of the covenant, God instituted the ritual of circumcision for Abraham and his descendants. Showing faithfulness, God continually renewed the promises to Abraham even when Abraham faltered in his faith, as when he passed off his wife Sarah as his sister so the Egyptians would not kill him to possess her (Genesis 12:10–20).

In the end, Abraham stood the test of faithfulness. When God commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, Abraham obeyed, and God spoke through an angel: "Do not lay your hand against the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you are God-fearing, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12). God provided a ram to be sacrificed in place of Isaac. Since then Abraham has been the model of Jewish faithfulness to God in all situations.

The story traces God's covenant through Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, to Jacob, Isaac's younger son. The sacred history does not present these ancestors as perfect heroes. Jacob, for example, cheated his brother, and by his cunning he established himself as a wealthy man with twelve sons. A key story tells how Jacob wrestled with God one whole night, refusing to let go until he received God's blessing. With the blessing Jacob also received a new name: "No longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). The name **Israel** (*yisra 'el*) means "he strives with God," and it became the name of Jacob's descendants in a very expressive way: They are God's people who always struggle with God.

The story reaches the end of the prologue by describing how Jacob (Israel) and his family found their way down into Egypt during a drastic famine and how Joseph (one of the sons, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers) rose to great power in Egypt. This took place during the time that lower Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, Asiatic people who wrested control from the Egyptians for a time (ca. 1750–1550 B.C.E.). During this period the Hebrews, as Jacob's descendants were called, prospered in Egypt. But



Obeying God's command, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son Isaac, but an angel of the Lord stops him. Painting by Caravaggio. Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac, Caravaggio, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

eventually the Hyksos were driven out by the Egyptians, and the Hebrews consequently fell upon bad times under Egyptian domination. The sacred story tells how there arose a king of Egypt "who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8), who enslaved and oppressed the Hebrews. Here was the deepest crisis of all: The children of Abraham were in bondage, with the God of their fathers and the covenant with Abraham forgotten.

Exodus from Egypt The people cried out in their slavery, and "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). Now the great drama of deliverance, the **Exodus**, begins, as God called Moses to free this people.

As told in the book of Exodus, the birth of Moses took place under foreboding circumstances, for the Egyptians were killing all Hebrew infant boys to control the Hebrew population. But Moses' mother placed her infant son in a basket among the reeds at the brink of the river Nile, and he was found and adopted by a daughter of the king. Given an Egyptian name, Moses was brought up at the Egyptian court, but he became a fugitive because he murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. He fled to the desert east of Egypt, where he lived with Jethro, the priest of the Midianites, a clan related to the Hebrews. He stayed there for years and even married Zipporah, the daughter of the Midianite priest.

While Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law on the holy mountain of Midian, God, manifested in a burning bush, encountered him and told him to go to the pharaoh of Egypt and demand that he let the Hebrews go free. When Moses asked who this God was, God revealed the special name, "Yahweh," interpreting it to mean, "I Am"—associating the name Yahweh with the verb *hayah*, "to be." At the same time Yahweh identified with the God worshiped by the ancestors of the Hebrews:

> You shall speak thus to the people of Israel, "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for ever, my memorial throughout all generations.
>
> (Exodus 3:15)

Then Yahweh commanded Moses, with his brother Aaron, to deliver the Hebrews from Egypt and to bring them back to worship at this wilderness mountain after they escaped from Egypt.

When the pharaoh resisted Moses' demands, the story continues, God brought a series of terrible plagues, ending with the destruction of all the firstborn of the Egyptians, after which the pharaoh and the Egyptians finally relented. This "night of watching," described in Exodus 12, has ever since

been celebrated in the **Passover (Pesach)** festival. Each Israelite family was to slaughter an unblemished lamb, paint the doorposts with its blood, and roast and eat it with unleavened cakes and bitter herbs. They were to eat it with belt fastened, sandals on their feet, and staff in hand, in a posture of haste. This was to be a day of remembrance, a festival to be kept from generation to generation for all time—so all future generations could reexperience the great deliverance of the Exodus.

When finally the Hebrews, brought together under the leadership of Moses, escaped from Egypt, the Egyptians pursued. But God safely brought the Hebrews through the Red Sea (literally, the sea of reeds) but then routed and utterly destroyed the army of the Egyptians in that same sea. God led the Hebrews through the wilderness with signs and wonders, finally bringing them back to the holy mountain in the wilderness, Mt. Sinai.

Torah and Covenant at Mt. Sinai Here at Mt. Sinai, according to the Jewish story, the greatest miracle of all took place:

> Moses brought the people out from the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Because Yahweh descended upon it in fire, all of Mt. Sinai was smoking. . . . And Yahweh came down upon the top of Mt. Sinai, and he summoned Moses to the mountain-top. Then Moses went up. . . . And God spoke all these words: "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."
>
> (Exodus 19:17–20:3)

Thus, God spoke to Moses, and through Moses to the people of Israel, the whole Torah, the laws and commandments that would form the basis of life for *'am yisrael*, the people Israel.

The revelation of the Torah on Mt. Sinai climaxed with the making of the **covenant (berith)** with the people of Israel. The covenant God made with them was a two-way contract: God would be their God, bringing them to the promised land, protecting them; they would be a holy people, serving only Yahweh of all gods and obeying the commandments. After Moses told the people all the words of God and wrote them down, they sacrificed bulls as offerings. Moses took half the blood in basins and threw it against the altar; then he read the book of the covenant to the people. They said, "We will do all that Yahweh has spoken, and we will obey." And Moses flung the blood over the people, ratifying the covenant God had made with them on the basis of the Torah (Exodus 24:3–8). Here on Mt. Sinai came the self-revelation of God, and by it God created both Torah (the law) and Israel (the covenant people).

To understand the centrality and the uniqueness of this covenant relationship between Yahweh and the people Israel, it is helpful to see how the Israelite story contrasts it with the religions of the other peoples of the ancient Near East. Among the agricultural city-states of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine, a cosmic type of religion prevailed, with many gods in charge of the different forces of nature. It was the power of these gods that made the cosmos a functioning world, and the role of humans was to serve the gods, responding to their will, entreating them to act favorably, and empowering their vitality by periodic rituals and festivals. In this organic or biological view of the functioning of the universe, humans played an important role. When the vitality of the gods would run down (as, for example, when vegetation dies in the winter), it was necessary for the people by ritual means to expunge the used-up forces and restore the life-power of the gods.

Among the Canaanites, Israel's neighbors in Palestine, particular importance was attached to the storm-fertility god, **Ba'al**, and the fertility goddess, **Asherah**. To the Canaanite farmers, the powers of these gods of vegetation were of vital importance. Rituals aimed at awakening them so the crops would grow included sexual rituals at the local shrines in which all the people had the duty to participate. The people felt bound to the gods in the recurring cycles of the forces of nature, and serving the gods meant participating in those natural fertility cycles so the power of the gods would continually be replenished.

Contrasting the religion of Israel to this cosmic type of religion, which characterized the great civilizations of neighboring peoples, the Israelite story emphasizes over and again that the people of Israel are bound to their God Yahweh in a covenant relationship, based on law given by God. A covenant (*berith*) is a contract, a treaty between two parties, which binds them together with mutual promises and obligations. Rather than a cosmic or biological relationship, the Israelites were related to God in a political contract, with Yahweh as a personal partner who responded to them in the give-and-take of personal decisions and actions. Rather than focusing on the rhythm of the seasons of nature, their religion focused on encounters with Yahweh in the events of

their historical life. Rather than being bound by the laws of the natural processes of death and life, they were bound by the mutual obligations of the covenant, based on the covenant law mediated to them by Moses.

Israel's covenant law was communal law, containing stipulations both in relation to God and to fellow Israelites. Yahweh alone was to be worshiped, not with graven images and fertility rituals like the Canaanite gods, but with prayer and praise, with repentance and sacrificial gifts. Fellow Israelites were to be treated with equality and justice, to be loved as oneself. Israel's whole life, whether concerned with worship of God or with human conduct in society, was structured by Yahweh's covenant demand: "You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). It was by the keeping of the covenant that they retained their identity as "Israel, the people of Yahweh."

The Promised Land and the Kingdom

After the Exodus and the making of the covenant at Mt. Sinai, Israel's story continues with a movement toward the fulfillment of their destiny as Yahweh's people: the possession of the Holy Land and the establishing of the Kingdom of Israel. Characteristically intertwined in the story is the tension of the covenant, the "tug of war" between God and Israel symbolically portrayed by Jacob wrestling with God. God promises and demands and pushes Israel onward. Israel responds sometimes faithfully, sometimes unfaithfully. Yahweh punishes but restores in love. And the covenant relationship goes on between the two partners.

After setting out from Mt. Sinai to possess the promised land, according to the story, the people frequently murmured and rebelled against Yahweh. They even accused Moses and Yahweh of dragging them out to the desert to die. Yahweh punished—a whole generation died in the wilderness, including even Moses—but Yahweh also fulfilled the promise by bringing their descendants into the land of Canaan and giving them victory and possession under the leadership of Joshua. The actual conquest was, as we know from archaeology and other historical sources, a long process of infiltrating, conquering, and assimilating. It is described in the sacred history as a "holy war," with Yahweh at their head conquering the enemies with a divine terror. They would move onward with the portable shrine called the "Ark of Yahweh's Covenant" leading the way. When the ark began to move, Moses chanted, "Arise, O Yahweh, and may your enemies be scattered." And when the ark stopped, he intoned, "Rest, O Yahweh of the ten thousand thousands of Israel" (Numbers 10:35–36). These wars of conquest had religious meaning in that taking the land of Canaan was a covenant duty. The Holy Land was their promised inheritance, and by taking possession of it they were glorifying Yahweh's name before the nations. In retelling this story, then, the identity of the people of Israel has always been bound up with the Holy Land.

The people of Israel established themselves in Palestine by about 1200 B.C.E., and for the next two centuries they maintained a loose tribal confederation, adapting themselves to an agricultural rather than pastoral way of life, and rallying around tribal leaders (judges) to fight off hostile peoples. Eventually there came about two very important transformations of their destiny: They settled down as farmers, building cities to dwell in; and they became a kingdom, the Kingdom of David. Both these developments have central significance in the telling of the story, for both involved the relation of Israel to their covenant God.

Struggle with Canaanite Culture The first transformation involved the relationship of the newly arrived Israelites with the agricultural religion of the Canaanites, which centered on the fertility god Ba'al, together with the goddess Asherah and other gods and goddesses. The Israelites had been seminomadic pastoralists, wandering with their herds in the semiarid regions of the area. They had met their God Yahweh in the desert, and as they wandered, Yahweh went with them, the divine presence symbolized by the portable shrine, the Ark of the Covenant.

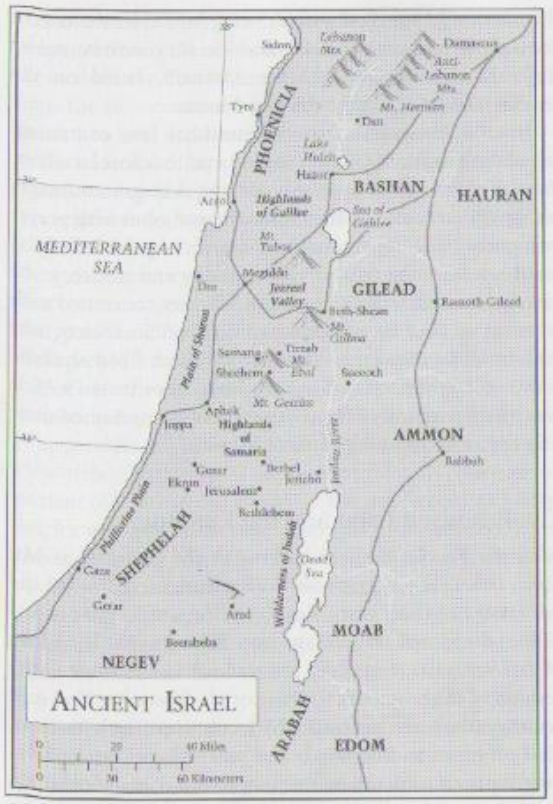
But now that they settled down, their way of life changed drastically. They became farmers and, influenced by their Canaanite agriculturalist neighbors, they were strongly attracted to the gods of the land. To some Israelites, Yahweh seemed to be the god only of the desert; but Ba'al and Asherah's powers were important for the vitality of the land, so they became worshipers of these fertility deities. Many Israelites tried to remain faithful to Yahweh, but they introduced fertility rituals and ideas into their worship of Yahweh. According to the prophet Jeremiah, upon every high hill and under every green tree the people were sprawling like harlots, participating in fertility rituals at Ba'al shrines (Jeremiah 2:20).

This struggle between faithfulness to Yahweh and the need to worship the gods of the land went on for many centuries, providing much of the drama of the Hebrew scriptures. The key question was powerfully articulated by the early prophet Elijah, in a day when the queen of Israel was none other than Jezebel, a Ba'al worshiper from Tyre and a fierce persecutor of the worshipers of Yahweh. The story tells how Elijah challenged the people, "How long will you keep on limping on two different opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Ba'al, follow him." So Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Ba'al to a contest, to see which god would answer their invocations by sending fire to consume the sacrifice. The prophets of Ba'al danced wildly, prophesying and crying out to Ba'al to no avail all day. Elijah indulged in ridicule: "Cry louder, for he is a god. Perhaps he is musing or engaged, or he is on a journey, or maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." Finally, it was Elijah's turn, and he prayed: "O Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today may it be known that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant." The fire of Yahweh fell, consuming the offering and the whole altar; and the people fell on their faces and cried, "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!" As a final emphatic gesture, Elijah seized the prophets of Ba'al and Asherah and slaughtered them all (I Kings 18:17–40).

Such stories tell how the Israelites, struggling and faltering, finally came to know Yahweh as the one God of all, even of the rain and the land and the crops. The upshot of the whole dramatic struggle of Israel with Canaanite culture is the overwhelming monotheistic commitment emphasized in the psalms and prayers and prophetic writings of the Hebrew scriptures, echoed in the rabbinic writings and the liturgies of the Jewish synagogues.

The Kingdom of Israel The other great transformation that the story brings to center stage is the creation of the Kingdom of Israel. The story delights in the struggle between Israel and Yahweh. The initial impulse toward kingship in Israel was the desire to have "a king to rule over us, like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:5), and this was understood by the tribal leader Samuel to be a rejection of Yahweh, who had always been their king in the covenant relationship.

In the characteristic double action of warning and promise, Yahweh warned them through Samuel of the tragedies and failures that lay ahead in becoming a king-



dom ruled by a powerful king, warnings that are abundantly illustrated in the stories of the sins and rebellions of the kings over the next five hundred years in Israel. But Yahweh also responded positively to the request for a king, and the symbol of Yahweh ruling through the agency of the king of Israel became a primary element of the religion of Israel. First Saul was anointed as a tribal king, but it was really David (ruled ca. 1000–960 B.C.E.) who consolidated all the tribes into the Kingdom of Israel and established the religious model of the king, adopted son of Yahweh, with whom Yahweh made an everlasting covenant to rule over the sacred people. The Davidic kingship, thus, was integrated into the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the chosen people. This was celebrated in one of the psalms:

Your love, O Yahweh, I will sing forever! . . .
Of old you declared in a vision
and spoke to your faithful one:
"I have endowed a warrior with strength,
I have exalted a chosen one from the people.
I have found David my servant,
with my holy oil I have anointed him. . . .
He will cry to me, 'You are my father,
my God, my saving rock.'
And I will make him first-born,
highest among the kings of the earth.
Forever I will maintain for him my love,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.
I will establish his posterity forever,
and his throne as the duration of the heavens."

(Psalm 89:1, 19–29)

A king must have a royal city, according to the divine kingship ideology of Israel's surrounding cultures, with the god of the kingdom dwelling in the royal temple. Therefore, in Israel there was established the holy city of Jerusalem and the temple on Mt. Zion—extremely important symbols in the Jewish religious tradition. David was originally king only over the tribe of Judah, ruling from the Judean city of Hebron. But when the elders of all the tribes of Israel made a covenant with David before Yahweh and anointed him king of Israel, David needed a new capital city outside tribal territory to symbolize the unity of all the tribes. So he and his personal army attacked the Canaanite city of Jerusalem and took it. David took up residence in the stronghold of Zion, now renamed the City of David, and built his palace there. Prior to this time, the Ark of Yahweh's Covenant had been moved around to different sanctuaries among the tribes, but now David wanted to bring this shrine of Yahweh's presence to his royal city to symbolize the religious unity of the new kingdom. So in a great festive procession, the ark was brought up to Zion, the City of David, and placed in a tent sanctuary there (II Samuel 6). Now Yahweh was present in Zion, the holy city.

But this new interpretation of Israel's relation to their God was not accomplished without the characteristic struggle symbolized by the name of "Israel." When David decided to build a temple for Yahweh in place of the tent on Zion, the prophet Nathan brought word that Yahweh preferred dwelling in a tent. From the religions of the surrounding peoples, the Israelites knew that the god of the land, Ba'al, was housed in temples rooted in the earth. To build a temple for Yahweh seemed to some a rejection of their God who had delivered them from Egypt and dwelt among them in the holy tent.

Yet David's son Solomon, in a time of peace and prosperity, accomplished what had been denied to David. With the help of Canaanite architects and workers, he constructed a magnificent temple, thirteen years in the building. In a great festival, the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant to the inner shrine, the Most Holy Place of the temple, and "the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh" (I Kings 8:11).

The Idea of the Messiah It is from the role of the king as the deliverer of Israel that the notion of the "messiah" arose in Israel. Originally the term **messiah**, which means "anointed one," applied to the king as the one anointed to lead Yahweh's people. But eventually the kingship was swept away in the destructions from foreign invasions. Yet the kingship had become an important part of the religious vision of Israel, and the expectation arose that God would not abandon the promises to King David, that one day the Kingdom of David would be restored and made great in the earth once more. Thus, when the kingship fell on bad times, the hope arose that God would sometime in the future send a new son of David, a messiah, to restore the house of David. The idea of the messiah has undergone many developments in Jewish thought, but the basis of this important expectation was established when Israel chose, and Yahweh accepted, a king over the people Israel.

With the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel, the king ruling over Yahweh's people, and the temple as Yahweh's presence in the holy city of Jerusalem, the promised destiny of the people of Israel might seem to have been reached. And in a certain sense that is true, for most of the primary symbols of the Jewish tradition had by now been created: Abraham, Exodus, covenant and Torah, holy people, Yahweh as Lord of all the earth, the king, the messiah, and the holy city of Jerusalem with its temple. But the religion of Israel was based on a continuing covenantal tug of war with Yahweh, and that struggle went on in episodes of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, punishment and restoration, according to the sacred story.

Decline of the Kingdom: The Prophets

The story presents the history of kingship in Israel in dark colors. Even the glorious reigns of David and Solomon were marred by sin and serving other gods. The story reports that David's lust for the woman Bathsheba led him to have her husband murdered so he could have her. Solomon loved women so much that he had seven hundred wives, all princesses, and three hundred concubines; these foreign women enticed him to worship other gods. Finally, as punishment, God tore the kingdom from Solomon's son's hand, leaving only the tribe of Judah as the Kingdom of David, the other tribes breaking away to form the northern Kingdom of Israel.

The judgment passed on many of the kings of Judah and of North Israel is scathing. The great majority of them, according to the later story, turned away to serve other gods, oppressed the poor, and generally broke covenant with Yahweh, all this leading to the destruction and exile of both North Israel and Judah. The northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed and the population scattered by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. And the final night descended with the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah in 587 B.C.E. by the Babylonians and the exile of the few Jewish survivors in Babylon—the sole remaining heirs of the briefly glorious history of the covenant people of Yahweh. But in this struggle with darkness, a remarkable new religious phenomenon appeared—the **prophets** of Israel, providing yet another important element in the making of the Jewish religious tradition.

The early prophets in Israel were groups of seers who entered into visionary, ecstatic trances, like shamans, and gave out the word of Yahweh for a particular situation. Both Kings Saul and David, for example, were caught up in the ecstatic contagion of these bands of prophets (I Samuel 10:5–13; 19:18–24). Somewhat later, individual prophets began to speak forth God's word, as when the prophet Nathan brought God's judgment against King David for having taken Bathsheba. Elijah and Elisha thundered God's words against the Ba'al worshipers of their day.

Beginning with the prophet Amos in the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., there arose a series of individuals known as the "classical" prophets, those whose words were recorded in the scrolls of the prophets. The prophets were spokespersons for Yahweh. They received a word from Yahweh for a particular situation, and they proclaimed and interpreted it to the king and the people, no matter what the consequences, be it a word of promise and hope or a word of warning and judgment. Sometimes they acted out the "word" of Yahweh, as when Hosea married a sacred prostitute from one of the fertility shrines to demonstrate how God kept loving Israel even as they went after other gods (Hosea 1–3). Again, Isaiah walked naked through the streets of Jerusalem for three years as a visual warning that the Israelites would be led away naked as prisoners of war (Isaiah 20:1–4).

The prophets interpreted the word of Yahweh for the people, showing them how Yahweh had acted in the history of Israel and would continue to act in the future. They proclaimed that Yahweh had a plan, a design for the covenant people. The unfaithfulness of the people would lead Yahweh to punish and destroy them. But God would continue to love the people even in destroying them; eventually, the prophets envisioned, God would restore them anew as the covenant people.

The prophets strongly emphasized the ethical consequences of being the people of Yahweh, proclaiming the wrath of Yahweh when they did not live up to the covenant. Amos, for example, lashed out against the women of the nobility: "Listen to this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mt. Samaria, you who oppress the poor, who crush the destitute" (Amos 4:1). He uttered unthinkable words against the official religion, which he said masked the covenant demand for justice and morality. Through the prophet Amos, the word of Yahweh sounded forth:

> I hate, I despise your pilgrim-festivals,
> and I do not delight in your sacred assemblies.
> Even if you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,
> I will not accept them,
> nor will I look on the peace offerings of your fatted animals.
> Remove the noise of your songs from me;
> the music of your harps I will not hear,
> Rather, let justice roll on like the waters,
> and righteousness like an everflowing river.
>
> (Amos 5:21–24)

To be chosen people of Yahweh, the creator of the world, meant, according to the prophets, both a great rejoicing and a heavy responsibility to glorify God's name by demonstrating justice and righteousness in the world. And when they did not live up to their covenant commitment, they would receive special punishment from God. God's

word came through Amos: "Hear this word that Yahweh speaks against you, O Israelites, against the whole family which he brought up from Egypt: 'Only you have I known among all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities'" (Amos 3:1–2).

In their prediction of doom and destruction, the prophets insisted it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who was bringing the destruction, not the other peoples of the world. When the Assyrians came against Israel, the prophet Isaiah said the Assyrians, in spite of their arrogance, were merely the tool of Yahweh, the rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5). And Jeremiah interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians as part of God's plan. He spoke the word of Yahweh: "I am the one who made the earth, humankind, and animals on the earth with my great power and my outstretched arm, and I give it to whomever I will. Now I give all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, my servant" (Jeremiah 27:5–6).

But precisely because the prophets saw the invasion and destruction of Israel by foreign foes as God's own doing, they had hope, for they knew God would never abandon the divine plan and the promises to the chosen people. Through this same Jeremiah, God spoke again:

> I will gather them from all the lands to which I banished them in my anger, wrath, and great fury, and I will return them to this place and cause them to dwell in safety. Then they will be my people and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart and one way of life, to fear me forever, for their good and their children's good after them. I will make an eternal covenant with them, not to turn away from doing them good. And I will place the fear of me in their hearts so they will not turn away from me. I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with my whole heart and soul.
>
> (Jeremiah 32:37–41)

Yahweh would not let the people go, the prophets said. God would make a new covenant with them and restore them to their land, so they could go on living as the sacred people.

So what would seem to be merely a tragic fate in the cruel movement of world history—a tiny nation perishing like countless others—becomes in the eyes of the prophets a part of God's own design. God is involved in human history through the chosen servant, Israel; as they suffer punishment, God suffers with them (Isaiah 63:9). A deeply moving image in the prophetic writings is that of the Suffering Servant. The great prophet who wrote the words contained in the second part of the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 40ff.) lived in Babylonian exile. To answer the question of why Israel was suffering so much, this prophet, whom we call Second Isaiah, spoke of God's plan to lay all the sins and burdens of the world on the chosen servant Israel (Isaiah 53). To Jews, this picture of Israel as God's Suffering Servant, bringing justice and righteousness into the world even as they suffer with God the pains and the rejections of the world, has been a sustaining force in times of suffering and persecution.

The Founding of Judaism

The Babylonian Exile (beginning in 587 B.C.E.) brought a drastic crisis in the sacred history of the Jews. In a sense, the story of Israelite religion came to an end, for the Kingdom of Israel was no more, and the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed never to reappear as a kingdom, with its survivors as exiles in a strange land far from Jerusalem. The story relates that God intervened again to deliver the chosen people from Babylon through the work of King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered the Babylonians and established the Persian Empire. As part of his enlightened policy, in about 538 B.C.E., Cyrus permitted and even assisted some Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem (II Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). But the few exiles who returned found Jerusalem devastated and the surrounding population hostile. The glorious Kingdom of David was forever gone. Something new had to be created, a Jewish community that could remain faithful to the covenant under these difficult circumstances. Here Ezra the scribe enters the story with what we may call the second founding of Judaism.

Ezra and the Early Jewish Community Ezra was a priest and scribe among the Jewish exiles still living in Babylon a century after the first groups of exiles returned to Jerusalem. The religious life of the Jews in Jerusalem was in disarray. The temple was used for secular purposes, intermarriage was producing children who could not even speak Hebrew (even the high priest had married a non-Jewish Samaritan), and businesses ran as usual on the Sabbath. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon with an unusual commission from the Persian king Artaxerxes giving him religious authority over all Jews in and around Judea, as well as silver and gold from the

Persian king to support the reestablishing of pure temple worship in Jerusalem. His official title was Secretary for the Law of the God of Heaven (Ezra 7:12). Ezra was learned in the Torah of Moses, and apparently he brought with him a copy of the Torah that had been edited by Jewish scholars in Babylon (Nehemiah 8:1).

Ezra's great task was to make the whole Jewish people renew their covenant obligations to their God; he argued that it was because they had broken the covenant that the disastrous destructions had occurred. He read the Torah publicly to the assembled people from early morning until noon. The reading and study of the Torah continued day after day, and the Jews renewed the covenant by swearing to obey all the law given by God through Moses. The purification of the people called for drastic action, for the reality of mixed marriages (Jews with non-Jews) had become such a deep problem that it threatened the very identity of the Jewish community. Ezra stood before Yahweh, weeping and confessing the sin of the people in marrying foreign wives and, thus, turning away from God. Drawn by this public display of emotional repentance, a great crowd gathered round and became convinced that the only hope lay in divorcing their foreign wives. A commission was set up to see that all mixed marriages were dissolved, and three months later the Jewish people were again pure (Ezra 9–10).

An important part of Ezra's purpose was to transform the lives of the people so they would keep the covenant in all aspects of their daily lives, and this went beyond the dissolving of mixed marriages. He brought the people together day by day to study the Torah—and in the process Judaism was transformed into a religion centered on the study of the Torah. Ezra probably drew on his own experience in Babylon. Since there was no temple there, the Jews met at the abode of religious leaders on the Sabbath, and there they read the Torah, studied it, and applied it to their lives. It is from these kinds of meetings that over the course of the next centuries the important institution of the **synagogue** stemmed. While the word *synagogue* came to mean a building, the Greek word originally referred to a religious meeting. Since these meetings took place apart from the temple, the focus was not on priestly sacrifice but on prayer and study of the Torah. To lead in studying the Torah, there developed a group of scribes capable of reading, interpreting, and applying the Torah—the teachers of Torah who later were called **rabbis**.

With these developments, Judaism, while remaining faithful to the ideals of Israel, the people of God, took on a new look. A transition had been made from a militarized kingdom to a community based on the Law of Moses. Now Judaism could exist with or without statehood, even scattered throughout the world. Central to life in the Jewish community was study of the Torah, and synagogues eventually developed wherever Jewish communities lived. Teachers of Torah became the key religious leaders, even though official religious and political power remained with the priests for a number of centuries.

The Maccabean Revolt and Roman Dominance The next centuries were stormy years for the Jews. Great events took place, such as the war of independence against the Seleucids of Syria. Climaxing long years of Seleucid rule over Palestine, Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (The Manifest [God]), tried to Hellenize the Jews—make them accept Greek culture and religion—and, thus, break and destroy the Jewish religion. Around 167 B.C.E., he set up an altar of Zeus in the temple and issued laws prohibiting the distinctive Jewish practices. Led in revolution by the Maccabean family, Jewish fighters managed to drive out the Seleucids and create an independent state that lasted for the next century. Their victory culminated in the cleansing of the desecrated temple in 165 B.C.E., an event celebrated in the festival of **Hanukkah**. But the Romans took over Palestine in 63 B.C.E., and Jewish national independence came to an end until about two thousand years later.

In spite of the Maccabean resistance, Hellenization did affect the Jews, especially those large numbers who lived in cities like Alexandria in Egypt, speaking Greek and following Hellenistic culture. For Jews such as these, a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek was made, called the Septuagint (because seventy Jewish scholars were said to have made the translation).

A central figure among Hellenistic Jews was Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–ca. 45 C.E.). Committed to the Jewish faith, he attempted to show its correlation with the major teachings of Hellenistic philosophy. He accepted Greek philosophical ideas such as the dualism of material and spirit, and he taught that through reason the soul can be illumined by God. In order to reconcile biblical ideas with Greek philosophy, Philo made use of allegory in interpreting the Bible; the biblical stories showed the human path in overcoming the passions and seeking spiritual

illumination. Abraham's journey to Palestine, for example, is an allegory of the soul's journey toward God.

During the Roman period in Palestine, Jewish groups developed that pursued different ways to live according to the Law of Moses. There were the **Sadducees** who made up the ruling class, the priests, and the nobility, who cooperated with the Romans and lived conservatively according to the Law. Activists called **Zealots** agitated for the violent overthrow of Roman dominion and the establishing of a new independent Jewish state. Separatists called **Essenes** withdrew from Jewish society because they considered it too corrupt; they lived in the desert near the Dead Sea and attempted to practice a "pure" Judaism. There was a group known as the **Pharisees**, including many scribes and teachers (rabbis), who reinterpreted the Torah in such a way as to apply it to all aspects of Jewish life. It was these Pharisees who were the forerunners of what is known as **Rabbinic Judaism**. And some Jews looked to Jesus of Nazareth, one of these rabbis, as the messiah (the Christ) and called themselves "Christians"; these messianists eventually parted company with Judaism.

The Development of Rabbinic Judaism An important event for the development of Rabbinic Judaism was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. and the scattering of the Jews. This event initiated what is known as the Great **Diaspora**, or "scattering" of the Jews. It destroyed what had been the heart of Judaism: the temple and the Jewish community in Jerusalem. The establishment represented by the Sadducees, centered on the temple and its institutions, came to a final end. The Zealots held out at the mountain fortress **Masada**, near the Dead Sea, for several years; finally the whole group committed suicide rather than submit to the Romans, providing for all Jews a symbol of bravery and zeal. But this was the end of the Zealot aspiration. The Essenes were destroyed in the general upheaval. But the Pharisees scattered to other places, taking their Torah scrolls with them, setting up synagogues and schools to study the Torah. It is this branch of Jews—the rabbis of the Pharisees and their followers—who continued the religion of Judaism in Palestine and beyond, structuring it as we know it today.

And so the sacred history of the Jewish people includes stories about the rabbis. A story about an important rabbi, Johanan ben Zakkai, and his disciple, Joshua ben Hananiah, takes this view of the destruction of the temple:

> It happened that R. Johanan b. Zakkai went out from Jerusalem, and R. Joshua followed him, and he saw the burnt ruins of the Temple, and he said, "Woe is it that the place, where the sins of Israel find atonement, is laid waste." Then said R. Johanan, "Grieve not, we have an atonement equal to the Temple, the doing of loving deeds, as it is said, 'I desire love, and not sacrifice.'" [1]
>
> (*Ab.R.N*, IV, 11a)

The Western (Wailing) Wall, a most sacred site for Jews, is part of the foundation of the ancient temple. Above on the temple mount is the Muslim Dome of the Rock mosque.

The rabbis taught that the temple was everywhere, in the home and in the heart; Jewish life has sacrifices greater than those of the temple. The Torah had commanded, "You shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Therefore, the laws of the Torah about purity, thought by some to apply only to the temple, were to be extended to the life of every Jew in the home. The other realities of the life of Israel, God's people, were gone—the kingship, the Holy Land, and the temple. But the Torah

remained. And in keeping the Torah, the Jewish community, wherever it might be, was fulfilling all the hopes and dreams of Israel, the people of God.

The Making of the Talmud But how can the obscure, arcane, and difficult rules and commandments scattered throughout the Hebrew Torah, given in an ancient age for use in temple rituals, be "kept" by Jews living in a totally removed age and place? We can end our brief look at the essentials of the story of the founding of Judaism by hearing the rabbis on that: God has also given the "oral Torah," which interprets the written Torah in practical, everyday settings. According to the rabbis, at Sinai God handed down a two-part revelation: the part Moses wrote down and passed on publicly in Israel as the Torah; and the oral part, preserved by the great heroes and prophets of the past and handed on to the rabbis who finally wrote it down (the Talmud). The *whole* Torah, thus, consists of both parts, the written Torah and the oral Torah. And by studying and living according to the whole Torah, one is conforming to the very will and the way of God.

A striking Jewish notion is that the oral Torah is open-ended; new things can be discovered in the Torah. Whatever the most recent rabbi learns through proper study of the Torah can be considered as much a part of the Torah revealed to Moses as is a sentence of the Hebrew scripture itself. In that sense, learned Jews actually participate with God in the giving of the Torah. For Rabbinic Judaism, keeping the Torah becomes the key element in God's design for the world. It is said, for example, that if all Israel would properly keep a single Sabbath, the messiah would come. If Israel would fully and completely keep Torah, all pagan rule would end.

Because of this central importance of keeping the Torah, the Jewish sacred history tells also about the great rabbis who participated in the creation and writing down of the "oral Torah" (the Talmud) as the essential guide to keeping Torah. There are, for example, the famous rabbis Hillel and Shammai in the early days of Herod's rule, who founded two houses that debated the law. Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, tortured and martyred under the Romans for teaching the Torah, gathered much of this rabbinic material, and his disciple, Rabbi Meir, elaborated it. Eventually the material was classified and written down under the direction of the Patriarch Judah I (135–217 C.E.) and was called the ***Mishnah*** (repetition).

But the rabbinic teaching and discussion went on among rabbis in Babylon and in Palestine. These additional discussions produced many further teachings and commentaries on the *Mishnah* known collectively as the ***Gemara*** (completion) or Talmud (instruction). By the end of the fifth century C.E., the *Gemara* was also written down and added to the *Mishnah*. Eventually the whole set of writings became known as the Talmud (existing in both a Babylonian and a Palestinian version). The creation of the Talmud, the "oral Torah," is one of the essential elements in the story that provides identity for Jews. In fact, it is the oral Torah, the Talmud, as interpretation of the written Torah, that lays out the complete Jewish way of life.

FURTHER TRANSFORMATIONS OF JUDAISM

Not long after the Babylonian Talmud was completed, providing a complete structure for Jewish life, the Islamic revolution burst onto the scene. For quite a few centuries the centers of Jewish life were in Muslim lands: Baghdad (in Babylonia), Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. The Middle Ages were full of suffering and persecution, although Jewish life continued to develop and flourish. With the Enlightenment came the beginnings of Jewish emancipation, and Judaism developed in new ways to meet the challenges of the modern age.

Jewish Life and Thought in Islamic Contexts

Muhammad respected the Jews as "people of the book," seeing himself as the last of the line of prophets. Few Jews followed Muhammad's new revelation, but generally Muslims allowed Jews to live peacefully within the vast territories taken over by the rapid Islamic expansion. As Muhammad and his successors were establishing dominion over all of western Asia, North Africa, and Spain, Jews in these lands continued to look to the Jewish academies in Babylonia for leadership. As new situations arose, they submitted questions to the rabbinic leaders (Geonim) of these academies, who provided answers (*responsa*) with new interpretations of the Talmud. Through their responsa, these scholars fixed the pattern of Jewish worship and life.

During this time, Islamic scholars held the intellectual leadership of the Mediterranean world, translating the whole corpus of Greek scientific and philosophical thought into Arabic. A number of Jewish thinkers were attracted to this new learning, but there were also reactions against it. For several centuries Jewish thinkers struggled with the problem of faith and reason: Is truth acquired by one's own reason and judgment, or simply from the authoritative revelation of the Torah?

The Challenge of the Karaites A crisis appeared in the eighth century when a group arose to challenge the whole conception of the Talmud as the oral Torah. The **Karaites** (scripturalists) demanded that scripture alone be the guide for life, rejecting the centuries of accumulated rabbinic interpretation. In part, the Karaites were rebelling against the authority of the Geonim, reflecting the feeling of some that the rabbinic scholars had grown distant and unresponsive. Operating in Arabic rather than Aramaic (the Talmudic language), they also were influenced by groups in the Islamic community that emphasized reason rather than established authority.

The Karaites appealed to the individual's reasoned interpretation rather than to rabbinic authority, offering simple, direct understandings of the injunctions of the Torah. For example, since Exodus 35:3 prohibited the kindling of fires on the Sabbath, the Karaites held that Jews should spend the whole Sabbath in the cold and darkness—against the rabbinic interpretation that fires can be used (although not kindled) on the Sabbath. They rejected ritual objects such as phylacteries and festivals such as Hanukkah, because they were not mentioned in scripture but rather constructed by the rabbis. Trying to break away from the Talmudic rabbis, they set up a community in Jerusalem, and their influence spread throughout the Jewish communities, posing a threat to Rabbinic Judaism.

The challenge of the Karaites was met by thinkers like Saadia ben Joseph (882–942), head of the Sura academy in Babylonia. Trained in Hebrew and Arabic learning, he provided an Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible. He was also learned in philosophy and was able to assure Jews there was no conflict between revelation and the kind of reasoning used by the rabbis. God has endowed humans with the ability to reach truth through reason, he taught, although revelation contained a higher, uncorrupted form of truth. Saadia's counterattack was successful; the influence of the Karaites waned rapidly, and the Talmudic tradition held sway.

Jewish Philosophy: Maimonides Troubled times came to the Muslim lands in Asia, and when some Muslims conquered Spain and established the Umayyad dynasty of Cordova, the center of Jewish life gravitated westward from Babylon to Spain. There a brilliant Jewish culture developed under a tolerant Muslim rule. The golden age of Spanish Jewry, from about the ninth to the eleventh centuries, included substantial contact with the Arab philosophical schools, and Jewish thinkers took up philosophical questions seriously for the first time since Philo. There was considerable resistance in some quarters to the use of such Greek philosophical rationalism, for the work of the Talmudic thinkers had always been considered the highest form of reasoning. The great writer Judah Halevi (1075–1141), for example, used his considerable literary powers to provide a lyrical defense of traditional Jewish piety. He insisted that Aristotle's speculative God is not the same as the God of Abraham; religious truth is to be found in the words of those who stood at Mt. Sinai rather than in speculative philosophy.

Moses **Maimonides** (Moses ben Maimon, 1135–1204) was born in Spain as times were becoming more troubled for Jews there. Muslims were rousing themselves to meet the challenge of the Christian crusades, and Jews were being forced to convert to Islam. So Maimonides' family migrated to Morocco, then to Palestine, and eventually to Egypt, where he became a brilliant Talmudic scholar and also physician to the Egyptian ruler. His great work was to attempt to reconcile the revealed scriptures of Judaism and the intellectual basis of Aristotelian philosophy. In fact, he felt that philosophical reason could provide the key to understanding the revealed scripture.

His influential book, *Guide for the Perplexed*, written in Arabic, gave a rational definition of the essential faith of Judaism, unlike the traditional rabbinic teachings that emphasized conduct rather than rationalized doctrines. His famous thirteen principles of the Jewish faith, although not attaining the status of a creed in Judaism, have been enormously influential and are included in the standard prayer books. They are as follows:

1 The existence of God, the creator.
2 God's unity.

3 God's incorporeality.
4 God's eternity.
5 The obligation to worship God alone.
6 The truth of the words of the prophets.
7 The superiority of the prophecy of Moses.
8 The Torah as God's revelation to Moses.
9 The immutability of the Torah.
10 God's omniscience.
11 Retribution in this world and the next.
12 The coming of the Messiah.
13 The resurrection of the dead.

In his view of the relationship between reason and revelation, Maimonides held that the scriptural prophecy consisted of a harmonious flow of reason and inspiration from God to the human mind. The prophecy of Moses was different in kind from the rest, for it was a perfect expression of God's will. Maimonides accepted Aristotle's proof for the existence of God, and he was particularly interested to show God's incorporeality; God could not be one if he occupied a body. He dealt with the problem of biblical anthropomorphisms (descriptions of God in human form) by allegorizing them; for example, God's "voice" is not to be taken literally but as a symbol of rational prophetic understanding. But he rejected Aristotle's idea of the eternity of the world, for that went against the biblical idea of creation.

As to the various laws of the Torah, Maimonides saw much practical benefit in them. The laws prescribing animal sacrifice weaned the Jews away from worshiping pagan gods; the dietary laws kept people from gluttony; and circumcision was a way of keeping sexual desire under control. Keeping the Torah, for Maimonides, contributed toward a decent, humane society. He thought of the messianic age as a time when humans could devote themselves to philosophical study, drawing closer to the knowledge of God.

Maimonides was very influential in his own times and ever since, even though his kind of rationalism did not win wide acceptance. His God of the philosophers was too rational for intimate relationship, and he was criticized for not including the idea of love in his philosophical system. A different kind of Jewish response to the increasingly rigid Talmudic structures and the challenge of rationalism had been building up for some time, with emphasis on the religious experience of the heart, and this burst forth in the form of Jewish mysticism.

Mysticism and the Kabbalah Close communion with God based on inner experience was integral to Judaism from the beginning. Moses on Mt. Sinai, face to face with God as he received the Torah, is a primary example of the inner mystical experience of closeness to God. Furthermore, there are poets like David in psalmic ecstasy and prophets like Jeremiah caught up in intimate communion with God's will. Ezekiel's vision of the chariot on which was enthroned the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:4–29) was especially considered the paradigm of the inner mystical experience of God.

In the medieval period, Jewish mysticism spread and took the form of the **Kabbalah** (tradition). Mysticism had developed together with the Talmud, in the form of popular oral traditions, and it held an important place in Judaism from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. Advocates of the Kabbalah considered it equal to the Torah, but its meaning was open only to initiates. The Kabbalah was an esoteric (inner) form of biblical interpretation that looked for the inner, secretive meaning of the text. Based on the notion that the Hebrew scriptures contained all divine truth, it found every word, letter, number, and accent of the Hebrew text to have some spiritual significance.

The central work of the Kabbalah was called the *Zohar* (splendor), written as a mystical commentary on the Torah. Using an esoteric method of interpretation, the *Zohar* portrays a grand vision of God's relation to the world. God as the ultimate reality is En Sof, completely transcendent and beyond all human thought. But from En Sof come ten emanations (*sefirot*), and these represent God's presence within the created spheres. Something of God is in every human and, therefore, by living pious lives according to the Torah, Jews can assist in restoring the fullness of God and of the whole universe. Such a vision, which took a variety of forms, fascinated many Jewish mystics and left an important imprint on Judaism. It also had a strong influence on certain medieval Christian thinkers. The mystics dealt with the same issues as the philosophers: the nature of God, creation, exile and restoration, good and evil. Their vision had a wide appeal, and they stimulated

expectation of the restoration through the messiah, providing meaning and hope to many who lived in difficult circumstances.

Tragedy and Response in Christian Medieval Europe

At the same time that Jewish culture flourished under Muslim rule, Jewish settlements were slowly spreading into Christian Europe. As early as the Roman period, Jews were brought to Italy, Greece, and other parts of Europe. With the triumph of Christianity, Jews came under certain restrictions, but Charlemagne (crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 800 C.E.) saw the important contribution that Jews could make to the economic and scholarly life of the empire and encouraged their immigration. These Jews of Germany and France eventually became known as Ashkenazim, whereas the Jews of Spain and the Mediterranean areas became known as Sephardim.

Crusades and Persecutions Jewish life and scholarship flourished in France and Germany. But a fateful day, November 26, 1095, brought a change that colored Jewish life indelibly. On that day Pope Urban II preached a sermon calling on Christians to recover the Holy Land from the infidel (the Muslim Turks). For the next two centuries a series of crusades aroused Christian religious passions and nearly always led to attacks on and massacres of Jews in communities throughout Europe—initiating a long, tragic period of Jewish persecution that went on for many centuries and was revived even in the twentieth century.

Aroused by the crusades, popular religious passions flared up against the Jews under a variety of pretexts. They were frequently accused of the ritual murder of a Christian, using the blood to bake unleavened bread for Passover—this blood-libel charge continued into the twentieth century. Another accusation was that of desecrating the sacred host (the consecrated bread, which was understood to be transformed into the body of Christ in the celebration of the Mass); Jews were often charged with stealing the sacred bread and tormenting Christ by piercing and pounding it. In times of plague, Jews were accused of poisoning wells of Christians or performing other forms of evil sorcery. If there was no other pretext, people could always be aroused against the Jews by the reminder that they were the killers of Christ. Beginning with Pope Inocent III and the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Jews were forced to wear distinctive badges and endure many other indignities. From the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, Jews were expelled from almost every European nation, sometimes a number of times.

The Story of the Marranos The story of Spanish Jewry is especially tragic. When massacres broke out in 1391, many Spanish Jews, unlike Jews throughout the rest of Europe, accepted Christian baptism and, thus, came to be accepted as equals of the Christian people. These "New Christians," called **Marranos** (pigs), often remained Jewish at heart and kept Jewish practices secretly as much as possible. As they thrived amid their Christian neighbors, new outbreaks of hostility occurred, and Queen Isabella set up a special tribunal for hunting out and punishing heretic Christians—the dreaded Inquisition. The first *auto da fe* (Act of Faith) in 1481 burned six men and women of Jewish extraction, and many thousands more were tortured and executed over the next few decades. Jews who had not become Christian still lived in Spain—but in 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand signed a decree expelling all Jews from Spain, a crowning tragedy for Spanish Jewry. Many went to neighboring Portugal, where again they were forced to become Christian by the brutal means of their children being seized and baptized. Great massacres occurred, such as the killing of two thousand New Christians in Lisbon in April 1506.

The Marranos and other Spanish Jews, fleeing these persecutions, made their way to many parts of the world, taking their special Jewish culture with them, including their language, Ladino (Hebraeo-Spanish). They went to Italy, England, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Other Marranos went to Turkey, Palestine, and Syria. Some migrated to the New World—to Brazil, Mexico, and Peru (followed even there by the Inquisition). In 1654, some Marranos from Brazil became the first Jews to immigrate to North America.

Renaissance and Ghetto The Renaissance in Germany and Italy included the active participation of many Jews as scientists and scholars. There was a Hebrew renaissance that strongly influenced Christian thinkers such as Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. As the leader of the Christian Reformation in its

initial stage, Luther was at first attracted to the Jews, but twenty years later he turned against them with savage verbal attacks, just as he also castigated the Turks and the Papists.

The Counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, with the church on the defensive, revived the old anti-Jewish laws, including the wearing of the badge. In 1555, Pope Paul IV forced Jews to live in Jewish quarters on certain streets, surrounded by high walls with the gates closed at night. These quarters were called **ghettos**, named after the Jewish quarter in Venice, the Ghetto Nuovo (new foundry). Of course, living in the ghetto afforded some protection to Jews from hostile people outside. And the ghetto acted as a conserver of Jewish solidarity and culture.

There was hardly any limit to the indignities the Jews were forced to bear. Their costume was regulated and their children were snatched away for baptism. They were forbidden to ride in carriages or employ Christian servants, and they were often denied the right to marry. They were forced to pay special tolls, take degrading oaths in court, attend conversionist sermons, and run stripped nearly naked in carnival races. But in the midst of this demeaning ghetto life, Jewish culture was shaped and even flourished.

Vibrant Jewish Life in Eastern Europe Jews had been living in eastern Europe for many centuries, but with the expansion of German communities into Poland came many more Jews. In the late Middle Ages, the persecutions in Germany and western Europe brought hundreds of thousands of Ashkenazic Jews to Poland and the surrounding Slavonic territories. It was there in eastern Europe that the heart of Jewish civilization was nurtured for a number of centuries up to the modern age. The Jewish community usually lived in towns or villages (shtetls), complete with synagogues, rabbis, holy days and festivals, weddings and funerals—everything that makes up the complete Jewish way of life. Self-governing, autonomous, with uneasy arrangements with peasant Christian neighbors, Jews were able to preserve their own values, language (Yiddish), institutions, and culture in full vigor, without being integrated into the Polish or Russian community at large. Jewish learning and scholarship were vigorously cultivated, especially the method of Talmudic interpretation called *pilpul*—special mental gymnastics centered on the text. Every town had an academy and distinguished scholars, and the town prided itself on the number of young men devoted to the study of the Torah and the Talmud.

But tragedy followed the Jews of eastern Europe also. Beginning with the Cossack rebellion of 1648–1651, when some 200,000 Jews were slaughtered, Jews of Poland and the Ukraine underwent centuries of persecution, leading up to the pogroms of the 1880s. The tide of refugees began to swell again, this time westward into the German states—and finally also to Palestine and to America.

A significant response to life in eastern Europe was the popular mystical revivalist movement of the **Hasidim**, founded by Israel ben Eliezer (1700–1760), known as the BESHT or Ba'al Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name). He taught that religious feeling and piety were more important than scholarship, and that each individual, no matter how poor or ignorant, could commune with God by spiritual exaltation and abandonment of self. There are certain Zaddikim (Righteous Ones), he taught, who are very close to God and carry on the leadership of the Hasidim (pious ones), as the disciples of the BESHT called themselves. They held large gatherings devoted to song and ecstatic dancing and feasting, spreading this revivalist movement throughout the Jewish communities of eastern Europe, attracting many Jews who were disillusioned with the rigid intellectualism of the Talmudic rabbis. In reaction, the traditional rabbinic leaders tried to expel those of the Hasidic movement. But gradually both sides became more moderate and tolerant, and the Hasidim, now numbered by the hundreds of thousands, took their place as a legitimate part of the Jewish way of life. Through the Hasidim, the emotional, poetic, and mystical dimension of religion was reinforced within Judaism and has strongly influenced many down to the present day.

Emancipation and the Modern Age

The emancipation of the Jews throughout Europe was the great development of the early modern age, ushered in by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Enlightenment thinkers considered differences of race and religion to be mere accidents, thus opening the way to emancipation of the Jews and their full participation in society. Of course, age-old prejudices could not be swept away by mere ideas. It took drastic changes like the French Revolution of 1789 to make the decisive breach and bring down the walls of the ghetto.

Jewish Involvement in the Enlightenment The Enlightenment (Haskalah) form of Judaism emerged in the eighteenth century, alongside traditional Talmudic Judaism and Hasidism, and it is well represented by **Moses Mendelssohn** (1729–1786). Born at Dessau in Germany in a medieval Jewish ghetto, he paid the special Jewish toll to enter the gate of Berlin and, thus, symbolically brought the Jewish community into the modern world. After studying in Berlin, he won a prize from the Prussian Academy of Sciences for the best philosophical essay, and immediately he was accepted and courted by the enlightened intellectuals of Prussian society. The writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, for example, was a close friend and modeled his *Nathan der Weise* after Mendelssohn. This enlightened, modern Jewish thinker brought together two strands that had heretofore been totally separate: traditional Jewish life and ritual, on the one hand, and enlightened scientific thought, on the other. Mendelssohn attempted to build a bridge between Judaism and Christian Germany by providing an interpretation of Judaism as a rational system of ethics thoroughly compatible with modern scientific thought. Moving away from Yiddish, he made a translation of the Torah in excellent German, with a commentary in pure Hebrew. Thus, he provided an impetus for Jews to pursue both Germanic studies and modern Hebrew letters, transcending the ghetto boundaries of Yiddish (Hebraeo-German).

The Jews of the Enlightenment, like Mendelssohn, had to perform a balancing act. Mendelssohn remained a loyal Jew practicing his religion, but he also participated fully in the intellectual life of the Enlightenment. His fellow Jews wondered about his rationalism and rejection of everything mystical, and his philosophical colleagues wondered about his continued practice of Jewish tradition. As the age of the Enlightenment ended with pressures of reaction and nationalism, Jews increasingly had to make a decisive choice, as exemplified by Mendelssohn's own children—either as Jews, or baptized as Christians, or as free thinkers.

Many Jews of the nineteenth century participated in the revolutionary movements sweeping Europe, which established constitutional governments, and with this they were granted full emancipation as citizens. This, however, was accompanied by ever more vicious reactions and new outbreaks of hostility from their fellow citizens. Now that the religious basis of persecution became less persuasive, the prejudices were transferred to other grounds—national, ethnic, or "racial"—culminating in the anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with its tragic, shattering consequences.

Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist Many Jews, especially in eastern Europe, retained the traditional Jewish life with little substantial change or question. But in western Europe and later in America, leading Jewish thinkers responded to the Enlightenment, scientific progress, and the Industrial Revolution with new proposals for change in the traditional Jewish way of life—or impassioned defenses of that life. Their proposals and responses created the main forms of Judaism today.

The movement called **Reform Judaism** started in Germany as Jewish thinkers, influenced by Mendelssohn and others, attempted to modify traditional Jewish practice in keeping with the ideas and realities of modern, scientific, secular life. With Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) taking the lead, these Jews advocated changes such as using German in the synagogue, men and women sitting together, organ music, and modification of dietary restrictions to better fit the modern age. Dropping or modifying practices that had ancient roots but did not fit the sensitivities of the modern age would allow the eternal meaning and message of Judaism to shine through for modern people. Geiger argued that Judaism changes with each age, reflecting God's progressive revelation in history. What was appropriate for one age might no longer fit in another. These Reform Jews emphasized the ethical dimensions of Judaism more than the ritualistic aspects, and they rejected the idea that the messianic age would mean a return to Zion. Rather, the goal of peace and harmony should be pursued in the European nations to which these emancipated Jews had dedicated themselves.

As German immigrants to America swelled in the mid-nineteenth century, Reform Judaism was firmly established. An early Reform document, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, stated that only the moral laws of Judaism were binding, and only those ceremonies that elevate life in modern civilization should be retained. Thus, most **dietary laws** went out, and the traditional prayer shawl and head covering became obsolete. In recent decades, Reform Jews have moved to recover more of the traditional Jewish liturgies and practices, in keeping with the need of Jews today to establish their Jewish identity in our thoroughly secularized society. Since 1972, Reform Judaism has been extending rabbinic ordination to women.

A woman rabbi reads from the Torah scroll in a synagogue service.

Some Jews in Europe were uneasy with the radical changes brought about in Reform Judaism and the arguments based on enlightened, rational grounds. This moderate movement, later known in America as **Conservative Judaism**, was led especially by Zecharias Frankel (1801–1875) in Germany and later in America by Solomon Schechter (1847–1915). Judaism has indeed changed over the centuries, they acknowledged, but such changes have always developed from the living experience of the Jewish people as they centered their lives on the traditional rituals, which, Frankel argued, form the very soul of Judaism.

In America, the Conservative movement was swelled by the arrival of a large wave of immigrants from Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. These immigrants shied away from the modernized Reform synagogues and were attracted to the Conservative congregations, which kept many of the traditional rituals but opened doors for the newly arrived Jews to begin the move into American society. In recent years, Conservative Judaism has addressed the issue of women's rights, first by allowing women to read the Torah from the pulpit and by counting women toward a minyan (quorum of ten). In 1985, the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly began to accept women into membership.

A Jewish movement born in America grew from Conservative Judaism. From the distinctive teachings of Mordecai Kaplan, professor at Conservative Judaism's Jewish Theological Seminary, came **Reconstructionist Judaism**. Kaplan construed Judaism as a civilization that evolved to serve the needs of the Jewish people. The rituals, laws, literature, art, folkways, values, and ideals of Judaism should be "reconstructed" to provide the highest degree of Jewish self-realization. Although the Reconstructionist movement is small, its ideals have influenced Reform and Conservative Jews considerably. Women are also being ordained as rabbis in the Reconstructionist movement.

The challenge of modern, enlightened Judaism both in its Reform and Conservative forms called forth a strong reaction in Europe and America in the form of the **Orthodox** movement, led especially by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) in Germany, who believed Jews had to retain their total adherence to Jewish law even as they participated in the life of secular society. Hirsch and the other Orthodox leaders attempted to interpret the tradition so it would be more attractive to enlightened modern people, but they insisted on the divine authority of the entire Torah and the necessity of observing all the traditional rituals. This, Hirsch argued, was the way God had revealed for the training of the authentic Jewish person, and abandoning any part of the traditional practices amounted to a betrayal of Judaism.

In America, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, with whole communities in New York speaking Yiddish and carrying on the traditional Jewish way of life, augmented the Orthodox movement. Small communities of Hasidic Jews are also considered part of Orthodoxy in America. Orthodox Judaism is especially strong in the state of Israel.

Zionism, Holocaust, and State of Israel Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the modern movement of Zionism arose with the goal of Jewish national liberation. The pogroms of Russia caused many Jews to look for respite in a Jewish homeland, and in western Europe emancipated Jews became disillusioned over the continuation of persecutions and discrimination. One sobering event was the Dreyfus trial in 1894. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew in the French Army, was falsely convicted of treason in a blatantly anti-Semitic court proceeding, showing dramatically the precarious position of Jews even in a modern European society. Theodore Herzl (1860–1904) of Vienna provided an impetus for Zionism by writing an influential book, *The Jewish State*, and organizing the World Zionist Congress (1897). He and others felt that only in a state with Jewish sovereignty could Jews finally end their homelessness and shape their own destiny.

Some Jews (like Herzl himself) were indifferent to the location of the Jewish state. But many Jews, especially those from eastern Europe, began to advocate Palestine as the only place for the Jewish homeland, where the historic Jewish way of life, steeped in the biblical values and ethos, could be preserved and cultivated. Jews began immigrating to Palestine, helped by the Jewish National Fund with contributions from Zionist Jews through the world. Not all Jews at this time were Zionists. Reform Jews tended to prefer assimilation within the national societies, and some Orthodox groups felt the restoration of Zion could take place only with the coming of the Messiah. But history itself gave the answer to the problem, with the Nazi **Holocaust** destroying European Jewry and providing the definitive answer for almost all Jews of today: The Jewish homeland is essential so that this will never again happen to the Jewish people.

The Holocaust, as the great modern example of humanity gone amuck, has evoked a number of responses among Jews of today. Some have spoken of the eclipse of God, the hiding of God's face in these tragic events. More radical thinkers speak of the death of God and hold that it is no longer possible to believe in God "after Auschwitz" (one of the Nazi death camps). Still others attempt to reinterpret divine providence in the face of this modern outburst of evil. One survivor of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel, says it is better to keep silent than to try to explain the unexplainable; he simply tells the story so humankind will not forget. For many, both Jews and non-Jews, the Holocaust has become a symbol for the unthinkable inhumanity that can be unleashed by humans, a portent of other holocausts that could erupt through nuclear conflict, military struggle, ethnic cleansing, or other brutalities of our modern age.

One immediate effect of the Holocaust was the impetus given to the creation of the state of Israel. Jewish refugees fled the devastation of Europe and migrated in increasing numbers to Palestine, joining Jewish communities established there in the earlier phases of the Zionist movement. Supported by Jews all over the world, these Jews declared Israel to be an independent state in 1948, a Jewish state that would forever be a homeland for all Jews. The Jewish state has had a troubled history since that time, with many clashes with the Palestinians and surrounding Arab states. But in the biblical land, Jewish identity has been forged anew. The biblical language of Hebrew is heard again, now as a modern language. The age-old festivals are celebrated, and the full Talmudic way of life is made possible once again. Of course, many Israeli Jews have become secularized, and the majority of Jews live elsewhere in the world. But for all of them, the state of Israel helps provide a link with the traditions of Judaism and a guarantee that the Jewish people have survived and will continue to exist as the people of God in the eternal covenant.

Continuing Struggles and Hopes

Today Jews live all over the world, with largest concentrations in Israel and in North America. Although Jewish peoples are for the most part well integrated into the societies in which they live, struggles and problems remain, of course. Lingering anti-Jewish emotions sometimes resurface in a variety of ways—for example, from ignorant Christians who repeat medieval accusations against Jews, from political ideologists who accuse Jews of conspiracy in business, media, and politics, and from Arab and Muslim peoples who have strong feelings about the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. Some Jews still find it necessary to leave their longtime homelands, as in the former Soviet Union or in Ethiopia, and immigrate to Israel.

Within the Jewish communities, a great diversity of attitudes continues to exist, all the way from strictly observant orthodox Jews to completely secular, nonpracticing Jews. When it comes to issues that might threaten the continued existence of the Jewish people, Jews of all types

tend to unify in providing support. Two such issues seem paramount at the present time: the problem of interfaith marriage, and the conflict in the Middle East. Many rabbis are deeply concerned over the high percentage of Jewish young people in the West who are marrying non-Jewish spouses. Such a situation makes it difficult to carry on the traditional Jewish family life, and in many cases the children grow up without fully identifying themselves with the Jewish tradition. Some interfaith families experiment with involvement in the religion of both spouses, for example, celebrating both Hanukkah and Christmas. But the fear of many Jewish leaders is that the special character and commitments of Jewish life will diminish for the children in such families and, eventually, in the whole Jewish community.

The long-standing and continuing conflict between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Arab peoples is a source of much anguish for Jewish peoples throughout the world. Jews are united in considering the security and ongoing life of Israel to be essential for the continued existence of the Jewish people, and that means the Israelis must defend themselves against Palestinian terrorist attacks. Yet some Jews are troubled with Israel's longtime occupation of Palestinian lands, the increasing numbers of Jewish settlements, and the sometimes brutal employment of military means in seeking out and destroying terrorists, in the process causing much suffering and death to Arab families. And so intense discussion goes on within the Jewish community, as well as concerned people of other faiths, hoping and praying for a just and secure settlement that will bring healing and peace both to the Jewish and Palestinian peoples.

In spite of such problems, the future is hopeful in the eyes of many Jews today. Jews are continuing to make enormous contributions to the welfare of our world in all areas of life—medicine, the arts, diplomacy, business, learning, philanthropy, and all the rest. Increasingly Jews are in conversation with peoples of other faiths, contributing to the overall increase in interreligious understanding that is so essential to the future of humankind. There is in many quarters a revival of the sense of Jewish identity, a feeling that the Jewish way of life is fully compatible with the demands of the modern world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way are the ancient figures of Abraham and Sarah important for the Jewish sacred story?
2. Describe the Exodus and the covenant at Mt. Sinai. How do these events of long ago still provide identity for Jews today?
3. How was the covenant relationship between Israel and their God different from the way other peoples of the ancient Near East understood their relationship to their gods?
4. In what ways does the history of ancient Israel reflect the sense of a covenant "struggle" between Israel and God?
5. Explain how the development of Israel into a kingdom brought about religious changes. What was the significance of the idea of the messiah?
6. Explain the role of the prophets in Israel. What was the special message of the prophet we call Second Isaiah?
7. Why may Ezra be called the "founder" of Judaism?
8. What is the origin of the oral Torah (the *Mishnah* and Talmud), and what is its significance in Judaism?
9. How would you characterize Jewish life under Muslim rule?
10. Do you think there is any relationship between Christian treatment of the Jews in the medieval period and the Holocaust in the Nazi era? Explain.
11. In the midst of persecutions, in what ways did Jewish life flourish in eastern Europe?
12. What do you think are the strong points of each of the modern American Jewish movements for presenting a viable and strong Judaism for the modern age?
13. Why do Jews living throughout the world think preserving the state of Israel is an essential mission for Judaism today?
14. What possible approaches do you see to the problem of interfaith marriage?
15. In what ways does the conflict in the Middle East raise religious concerns for Jews today?

Chapter 7

Jewish Worlds of Meaning

ONE GOD AS CREATOR, REVEALER, AND REDEEMER

What's it all about? Most characteristic of Jewish religious thought is the commitment to monotheism, one God as the creator and master of all. Modern historical study of the Tanakh has outlined the development of monotheism in the religion of ancient Israel. The religion of Abraham and the ancestors of Israel was not monotheistic, according to the stories in Genesis, but a distinctive practice was the worship of the clan God, the "God of the Father." Later Yahweh, the God of Israel, was identified with "the God of the Fathers."

But even Yahweh, as discussed in the previous chapter, was not at first known as the only God of all. Other gods of the land were also important for life and growth, so Israelite devotion was split between Yahweh and the fertility gods, Ba'al and Asherah. From another perspective, the religion of many early Israelites was henotheistic: Yahweh was their God to whom they must be loyal, avoiding the gods of other peoples. Since other nations had their own gods, at first the Israelites did not think of Yahweh as powerful over all peoples; those other peoples with their gods were hostile to Yahweh and Yahweh's people.

The Development of Monotheism

Through this struggle with other peoples and their gods, and through their own conflict over worshiping Yahweh and the fertility gods, the people of Israel came to understand the extent of Yahweh's power and presence in the world. They ultimately came to the conviction that their covenant God, Yahweh, was the one God of all nature and of all peoples.

Yahweh versus Ba'al The stories of the prophet Elijah (I Kings 17–22), who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel in the ninth century B.C.E., highlight the struggle between allegiance to Yahweh and worship of Ba'al, the god of the land. Since Ba'al was believed to be the god in charge of life-giving rain, Elijah issued a challenge right on Ba'al's front doorstep: "As Yahweh the God of Israel lives, whose servant I am, I swear that there will be neither dew nor rain these years unless I give the word" (I Kings 17:1). The drought lasted three years, until finally Elijah showed Ba'al up to be powerless in his great contest with the prophets of Ba'al on Mt. Carmel—and only then did Yahweh send rain. The story tells dramatically that Yahweh, not Ba'al, has the power to withhold rain and to grant it for the growth of the crops.

The prophet Hosea provides another viewing of the struggle between Yahweh and Ba'al in Israel's religious practices. From Hosea we learn that many Israelites participated in worship at Ba'al shrines, involving sexual religious rituals, offering raisin cakes to images of Ba'al, and the like—fertility rituals to promote the growth of the crops and the well-being of the people. Hosea himself, on orders from Yahweh, married a cult prostitute and had children by her to dramatize the relation between Yahweh and the covenant people. Through him it was forcefully demonstrated that Israel had broken the covenant with Yahweh, saying instead, "Let me go after my lovers, who provide me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink" (Hosea 2:5). Hosea portrays Yahweh lamenting over Israel like a rejected lover: "She does not know that I am the one who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, that I lavished silver upon her and gold

which they used for Ba'al" (2:8). But Yahweh does not give up on Israel, planning to punish the people in order to turn them back. Through Hosea, Yahweh says:

I will punish her for the days of the Ba'als,
in which she burned incense to them,
and decked herself with her rings and her jewelry.
For she ran after her lovers,
but she forgot me, says Yahweh.
But now, listen, I will allure her,
I will go into the wilderness with her
and speak lovingly to her.
And I will give vineyards to her there,
the Valley of Achor becoming a gateway of hope.
Then she will respond there as in the time of her youth,
as when she went up out of Egypt.
And on that day, says Yahweh, you shall call me "My Husband";
you will no more call me "My Ba'al."

(2:10–16)

Through the prophets, by such poignant images and actions as these, a new, deeper understanding of Yahweh grew in Israel. The realm of nature, fertility, and growth was not controlled by the Ba'als, or even shared by Yahweh and other gods of nature. Rather, the exclusive power and presence of Yahweh, Israel's covenant God, was felt in all areas of their existence. It was Yahweh who sent the corn at the harvest, the wine at the vintage; the Ba'als should be forgotten and never mentioned again.

Yahweh, God of All the Nations As Israel began to understand that Yahweh has power over all aspects of human existence, so also they struggled to overcome the limitations of a henotheistic view. At one time it was accepted that one could not worship Yahweh outside the land of Israel: "How can we sing the song of Yahweh in a foreign land?" asks one of the psalms used among the exiles in Babylon (Psalm 137:4). As late as the Babylonian exile, some Jewish exiles lost heart because they believed this catastrophe had proved that Marduk, the god of Babylon, was more powerful and had defeated Yahweh. But the prophets drew out the implications of their faith, extending the sphere of Yahweh's power to all nations. Amos insisted that Yahweh had brought not only Israel from Egypt but also the Philistines from Caphtor and the Aramaeans from Kir; and when any of these peoples commit crimes, it is Yahweh who punishes them (Amos 9:7; 1:3–2:3). The prophet Isaiah saw the invading armies of the Assyrians as Yahweh's "rod of anger" sent against the Israelites (Isaiah 10:5). And Second Isaiah, the prophet of the Babylonian exile, went so far as to describe mighty King Cyrus of the Persians as "the anointed one of Yahweh," whom Yahweh had taken by the hand to subdue nations before him (Isaiah 45:1).

In the vision of these prophets, Yahweh is no tribal God sharing power with other divine beings. The God of the covenant has universal power as the only God. Second Isaiah in particular stated eloquently the vision of a full-blown monotheism, ridiculing images of the gods that are powerless, insisting over and over that Yahweh is the one God, the creator and director of all:

To whom can you liken God,
or what sort of likeness can you compare to him? . . .
He is the one who sits throned on the vault of earth,
with its inhabitants like grasshoppers.
He is the one who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and he spreads them out like a tent to live in.
He is the one who reduces the princes to nothing,
he makes the earth's rulers as naught.

(Isaiah 40:18, 22–23)

Thus says Yahweh, the king of Israel,
their redeemer, Yahweh of hosts:
I am the first, and I am the last,
and beside me there is no God!

(Isaiah 44:6)

Not only Jews but also Christians and Muslims draw from this fundamental ancient Israelite vision of the Lord of Israel as the one God of all the earth, as expressed in the stories and the prophetic oracles of the Tanakh.

Jewish Vision of the One God

For over two thousand years devout Jews have twice daily recited the **Shema**: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Nothing in Jewish life is more hallowed than the saying of these words. These are the last words to come from the lips of the dying Jew and from the lips of those Jews who are present at that moment. This short creedal statement shows it is the *unity* of God that is the fundamental Jewish theological assertion. By and large Jews have not tended to develop systematic theology, that is, rational ideas and doctrines about God. Rather than defining God, they relate to God through

worship and through life. But they know the most important doctrine about God is that God is One.

God as One and Unique The Shema means, first of all, that God is not many. All forms of polytheism are rejected, for that tears God apart and, thus, also tears the world and humankind apart. Since God is one, all of reality is also a unified order, and there can be one universal law of righteousness that holds sway over all. No one is excluded from the rule of God, for there are no other gods.

The Shema also means that God is one, not two or three. At the time Rabbinic Judaism was developing, the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism was powerful, with a somewhat dualistic conception of reality: Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) is the God of goodness and light, but the realm of evil and darkness is controlled by the spirit Angra Mainyu (Ahriman). Such a theory is a handy explanation for the existence of evil in the world, and it was attractive also to some Jews and Christians. But the rabbis insisted that any thought of a divine power in competition with God had to be squelched. Furthermore, of course, Jews cannot accept the Christian idea that God is triune, Father, Son, and Spirit. The problem is not so much the different aspects of the one God as it is the Christian insistence on the incarnation of God in the man Jesus.

It is true that Jews have some sense of different aspects or modes of operation of God. The Tanakh often speaks of God's "spirit," "presence," "angel," or "glory" being present with the people. In the Middle Ages, Jewish mystics worked out a vision of God that contained both unity and diversity. God purely in Godself is *En Sof*, absolute and without limit. But the pure Godhead cannot be known to humans, so God is manifested in ten emanations known as the *sefirot*; God emerges from concealment in such a way that creatures can experience the divine reality. Some Jews have been uncomfortable with this Kabbalistic idea of God, but it does show that humans experience the one hidden God through various modes of God's self-revelation.

But saying that God is one is not just a matter of arithmetic. The Hebrew word for "one" (*ehad*) also means "unique," the one who is unlike any other. God is different from anything humans might name as gods or create as gods. From this sense of God's uniqueness arose the strict prohibition in Judaism against making any images or likenesses of God—for God is not like anything else. All else is made; God is not. All else changes; God does not. All else has rivals and comparables; God does not.

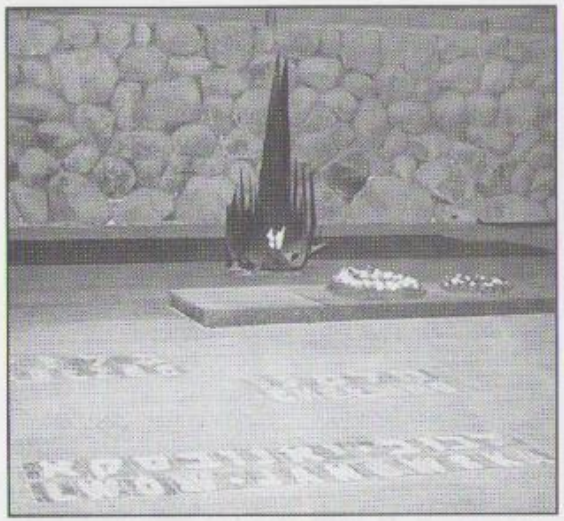
God as Transcendent and as Immanent Another way of putting this is to say that God is *transcendent*, that is, far above and beyond the created world. In total contrast to everything that has been created in time and space, God is eternal, with no beginning or end. God has no limitations of space or knowledge or power, being present everywhere, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Using terms like these, Jews point to the complete otherness of God.

But to say that God is transcendent is only half the story. Jews also hold firmly to the conviction that God is not just a God far off, but a God near as well. God is *immanent*, near and present to all creatures. The Tanakh tells how God's "spirit" or "presence" went with the people on their wanderings. Though the highest heaven cannot contain God, still the Israelites concretely felt the presence of God dwelling in their midst in the temple at Jerusalem. The rabbis spoke especially of God's Shekhinah (from the root *shakhan*, to dwell), that is, the divine Presence that filled the Israelite tent of meeting and that fills all the world as well.

Thus, God, the almighty creator, is immanent and at work within the processes of creation. The ongoing creator and sustainer of all continues at work, knowing when even a sparrow falls, giving food to each and every living thing. As creator, God is also the lawgiver, the source of natural law to which the world conforms and also of the moral law that guides human life. God is the director of history, unfolding the eternal will in the drama of the history of the sacred people and the whole world.

God is also present in a *personal* way, according to Jews. Although the human idea of person is inadequate to describe God, we have no better word to designate the experience of meeting God as a helper, a redeemer, and a friend. A Talmudic passage emphasizes the personal presence of God:

> Come and see how beloved Israel is before God; for wherever they went into exile the Shekhinah went with them. When they were exiled to Egypt, the Shekhinah went with them; in Babylon the Shekhinah was with them; and in the future, when Israel will be redeemed, the Shekhinah will be with them.
>
> (*Meg.* 29a)[1]



The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Israel, honoring the millions of Jews and others who perished under the Nazis.

God is one who loves the chosen people, as taught in countless ways by the rabbis. One of the favorite names for God that Jews use is "Our Father" (*abenu*).

God and the Puzzle of Evil The puzzle of evil casts a long shadow in the world, and Jews have known a large share of persecution and suffering. If there is one God, and God is both the almighty creator and a present loving father, what sense can be made of evil and suffering?

Since the times of Israel of old, Jews have struggled with this question, refusing to give up these beliefs that God is one, almighty, and loving. A variety of partial solutions to the problem of evil has been offered by Jews of different eras. For example, in some ways evil can be seen as the result of a previous sin of an individual or the community. Or it may be discipline or testing from God so that humans will learn to choose the good. If it seems too much now, it may be compensated in the life to come. What seems to be evil may result from a partial view of things, or it can be understood as the absence of good. But another kind of answer in the Jewish tradition is that of Job: "I lay my hand on my mouth," Job said, "I have uttered things that I do not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 40:4; 42:3). In discussions of the perplexities of evil and suffering, the rabbis like to quote a text from the Torah: "And Aaron was silent" (Leviticus 10:3). Once, according to a rabbinic story, Moses was transported to Rabbi Akiba's lecture hall and was granted a vision of Akiba's martyrdom—his flesh being weighted in the meat market. Moses protested, "Such is his knowledge of the Law, and such is his reward?" But God said, "Silence, so it has seemed good to me" (*Men.* 29b).[2] Theologizing about God is after all not the central focus in the Jewish tradition. To be a Jew is to experience God by living the life of Torah, not by rationalizing about God.

Since the Nazi Holocaust, however, there has been a great deal of discussion about God and evil among some Jewish thinkers. Some go so far as to say that it is impossible to believe in a God of the covenant after Auschwitz. Others hold that, whereas the Holocaust destroys all traditional categories of thinking about God, the experience of the covenant people with God goes on. Some feel that the main task of Jews today is to keep remembering the Holocaust; others say it cannot be spoken of today. In all, recognizing the breach in our thinking caused by this great outpouring of evil, Jews, like Israel of old, continue to struggle with God and refuse to let go.

THE WORLD AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

Creation and Preservation of the World

What sense is there in life? Why is there so much evil and suffering? What is the world all about? A sixteenth-century Jewish creed gives as the first principle of the Jewish faith: "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is the Author and Guide of everything that has been created, and that He alone has made, does make, and will make all things."[3] The Jewish tradition, as the root of the Abrahamic religions, first contributed the fundamental idea of God as the one creator, with the world as God's good creation. Jews see creation from the point at the center: God's giving of the Torah to the covenant people. According to a well-known rabbinic teaching, God first looked into the Torah and then created the world, following the design spelled out in the Torah.

A Good and Purposeful Creation At the very beginning of the Torah, the ancient scribes placed a priestly liturgy about cosmic creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4). According to this hymn, God first of all called forth the world from a dark, watery chaos, and by divine command made it a good, purposeful world. God, completely separate and sovereign, created the world as an orderly, functioning cosmos. The creator separated the light from the darkness, created a firmament to hold back the waters of chaos above, and placed lights in the heavens to rule the day and night and the seasons. God gave the earth the power to bring forth plants, each according to its kind, and creative powers were also given to earth and sea to bring forth every kind of animal and fish. Day by day, the creation liturgy goes on, God created and then rejoiced in what was made: "It is good!" Finally the poem has all of nature in place, from the seas and the dry land to the stars and plants and animals. Then God said, "Let us make *'adam* (humankind) in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of the heavens, the cattle, over all the earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth" (1:26). After creating humankind male and female in the divine image, finally God completed creation and rejoiced, "It is very good!" Resting on the seventh day, God instituted the Sabbath day as a day of rest and rejoicing in the good creation.

The Genesis story emphasizes the prior existence of God, transcendent and apart from the world. God has a design, a purpose for the world. But God is in no way mingled together with the creation; with a divine command all is called to be and to function. Later Jewish thinkers said that God created everything out of nothing, to emphasize that only God is eternal. The creation reflects the glory of God, but God is not within the creation. The world is God's creature, functioning according to the divine will and command.

God the creator is the ongoing preserver and guide of all creation. Every morning, traditional Jews repeat this blessing on creation from the daily prayer book:

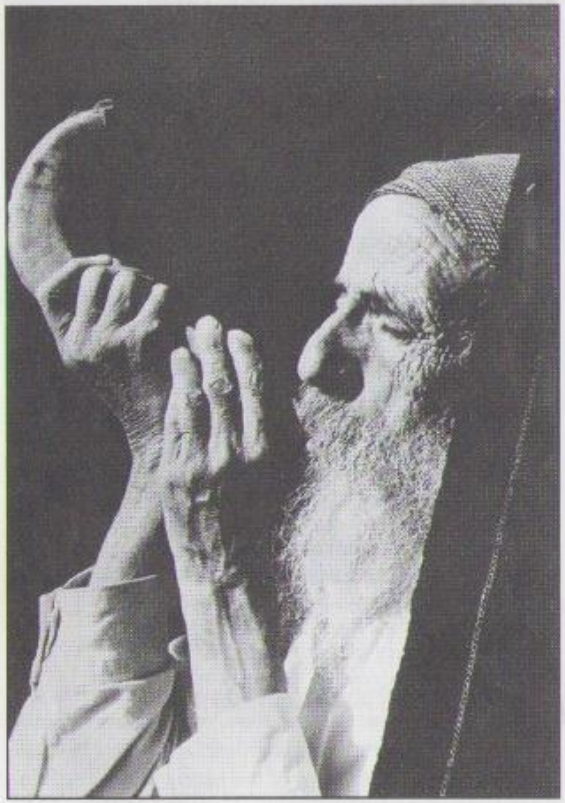
> Blessed are You, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe.
> You form light and create darkness,
> You ordain peace and create everything.
> You cause light to shine over the earth
> And over its inhabitants in mercy.
> In your goodness you continually renew the world of creation forever.
> How manifold are your works, O Lord!
> All of them you made in wisdom.

God is the personal, merciful creator who continually preserves and watches over the world, giving life and breath and food to all, returning living beings to the dust in their term, sending forth the divine spirit to replenish the earth. There is no place to flee from God's presence, no time or place of life when God is absent.

The Nature and Role of Humans The role of humans within God's orderly and purposeful creation is to serve the creator and fulfill God's will in the world. The creation story says humans are created "in the image" of God, and that is explained to mean serving as God's representative in ruling over creation. A hymn from ancient Israel puts it in lyrical terms:

> O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! . . .
> When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands,
> moon and stars which you established—
> What is humankind, that you should remember them,
> humanity, that you should care for them?
> Still you have made them but little less than God,
> crowning them with glory and honour.
> You give them rule over all the works of your hands;
> all things you have put under their feet.
>
> (Psalm 8)

The power of this vision of the nature and role of humans can be seen by comparing this Jewish view with the commonly accepted notion of the role of humans in the ancient Near East. Creation texts from Babylon, for example, say that Marduk, the creator God, made humans from the blood of a demon, mixed with clay, to be slaves to the needs and demands of the gods. But the Jewish view elevates humans to "little less than God," cared for and loved by God, and given the great responsibility of being master over all God's creatures. Humans are to serve God, but they are at the same time partners with God in the ongoing creating and preserving of the creation, working to fulfill the purpose and destiny of all. The rabbis taught that humans are copartners with God in the work of creation, by causing the earth to be inhabited and not desolate and by using human skills to further God's creative purpose. A judge who judges justly, for example, is given credit with being a partner with God in the work of creation (*Sanh.* 10a).



Blowing the shofar (ram's horn) on Rosh Hashanah is a symbol of God the creator summoning the people to new life.

Although humans are the high point of creation, the other creatures also have a role and purpose. In the traditional rabbinic scheme, humans are midway between the animals who have no moral sense, on the one hand, and the angels who cannot do evil and the demons who can do only evil, on the other. Animals are to be respected and treated fairly and humanely; inflicting unnecessary pain on animals is particularly to be avoided. One rabbi ruled that one must not eat before giving food to one's animals (*Ber.* 40a).

Serving God means a life of wholeness, faithfulness, and obedience. To the Jews has been given the Torah so that God's whole design for the good life can be followed. But to all humans God has provided guidance, through nature itself and through the human conscience. All humans know and can follow the basic principles of God's law, sometimes called the Seven Commandments of the Children of Noah:

1 Not to worship idols,
2 Not to commit murder,
3 Not to commit adultery and incest,
4 Not to eat a limb torn from a living animal,
5 Not to blaspheme,
6 Not to steal, and
7 To have an adequate system of law and justice.

In the Jewish view, human reason and understanding are not necessarily in conflict with serving and obeying God. Reason can lead astray when followed blindly, but used wisely and prudently, human reason can discern the basic principles of God's law and, thus, assist in living the good life.

The Shadow of Sin

The Jewish tradition values humans highly, but it has no delusions about human nature. Stories at the beginning of the Torah provide a realistic assessment of the human capacity for evil. Within the first human family, Cain rose up and murdered his brother Abel out of anger and jealousy, and God warned him—and all humans—that "sin is lying in wait at the door" (Genesis 4:7). Humankind became so evil that God sent a great flood to destroy them. But even righteous Noah's family and descendants demonstrated the same inclinations. These stories of rebellion and violence among the peoples of God's earth have strongly influenced the view of human nature found in Christianity and Islam also. Throughout the Jewish Tanakh there is abundant evidence of the human capacity for wickedness and for causing great suffering and destruction in God's good world.

In the teaching of the rabbis, human sin is *averah*, from *avar*, meaning "to pass over" or transgress God's will. Jews have a definite idea of what the good life is: following the commandments of the Torah. And sin is to transgress all this. Milton Steinberg explains the rabbinic view: Sin is "any act or attitude whether of omission or commission which nullifies God's will, obscures His glory, profanes His name, opposes His Kingdom, or transgresses the *Mitzvoth* [commandments] of the Torah."[4]

Struggle to Control the Evil Inclination In the Jewish tradition there is no idea of an evil or "fallen" human nature that inevitably drives humans to sin. Rather, the rabbis taught that there are two basic inclinations or drives in everyone: the *yetzer hatov*, the good inclination, and the *yetzer hara'*, the evil inclination. Sin results when a person lets the evil inclination get the upper hand.

But why did God create humans with the evil inclination? This is the inclination that drives humans to gratify their instincts and wants; it has to do with ambitions and appetites, including especially the sex drive. Thus, this "evil inclination" is really essential in providing motivating power for life. Commenting on God's words in the creation story, "It was very good," Rabbi Nahman ben Samuel said, "That is the evil inclination. But is the evil inclination very good? Yes, for if it were not for the evil inclination, man would not build a house, or take a wife, or beget a child, or engage in business" (*Gen. R., Bereshit*, 9:7).[5] Another rabbinic story tells that Ezra and his associates once wanted to kill the evil inclination. But the evil inclination (personified in this story) warned them that the whole world would go down if they did this. They imprisoned the evil inclination, but then they found that throughout the world there could be found no newly laid egg. Finally, they put out his eyes so he could not tempt people to incest (*Yoma* 69.b).

Thus, the Jewish tradition has the realistic view that life is a continuing struggle, but we can control the evil inclination and even use it in a positive, life-affirming way. The most important help in mastering the evil inclination is, of course, the Torah. A well-known rabbinic parable tells of a king who inflicted a big wound on his son but then counseled his son to keep plaster on the wound. As long as the wound was protected by the plaster, his son could eat and drink whatever he wanted without any ill effects; but if the plaster was removed, the wound would fester (*Kidd.* 30b). So also God has in a sense "wounded" humans by giving them the evil inclination; but he has also given them the Torah as the antidote, allowing them to live their lives without fearing that the evil within them will drag them down to ruin. Another rabbinic parable says the evil inclination is like iron that one holds in a flame in order to make a tool of it; so, too, the evil inclination is to be held in the fire of the Torah (*Avot de Rabbi Natan*, Ch. 16). So, in a morning prayer, Jews ask God: "Help us to walk in your Torah, and make us hold to your commandments. . . . Let the evil inclination have no sway over us. Make us hold to the good inclination and to good deeds."

Sometimes it is said that, unlike Christianity, which holds that a person sins because of being a sinner by nature, in the Jewish view a person is a sinner simply because he or she sins. That is, sin is an action of transgressing God's laws, not a state of being that is twisted and alienated from God. But this does not mean that Jews are unduly optimistic about human nature. The scriptures describe bounteous human evil, and Jews have seen sufficient evidence of that in their long history as a people. Saints do struggle and master the evil inclination; but even Moses sinned and was punished.

The Results of Sin Sin has consequences. The rabbis point out that when Cain killed his brother Abel, he also killed all Abel's unborn children. So there is punishment for sin, just punishment because sin arises from the free will of humans. Traditional Judaism knows the idea of Satan, the accuser who tests people and tries to lead them astray (Job 1–2). But Jews strongly affirm that we humans have free choice and do have the capability, with the help of the Torah, of mastering the evil inclination. Therefore, we are justly punished as the recompense for our sin.

But there are different kinds of sin and, therefore, different kinds of punishment, depending on whether the sin is against God or against one's fellow humans. In one sense, the rabbis say, the sin itself is the recompense of sin (*Avot* 4:2). The guilt and sorrow and alienation caused by doing a sin are surely retribution for the sin. Some recompense for sin comes in this life, both in terms of punishment by society and also punishment by God. Disease, war, and slavery can be divine punishment, as when God sent Assyrian armies against Israel or caused a plague to punish wrongdoers. But Jews are also aware of the problems involved in explaining misfortune and suffering as punishment for sin. The story of Job's innocent sufferings leads the rabbis to say that finally we do not know why the righteous suffer; even Moses did not know (*Ber.* 7a).

In traditional Judaism, it is emphasized that final recompense for sin is given by God in the life to come. The rabbis used this teaching to explain why the wicked could be prosperous in this life in seeming defiance of God's just laws; their recompense will come with torments and sufferings in Gehinnom. Some rabbis did teach that even those suffering in hell will rest every Sabbath, or that the punishment would

last for only twelve months. Many Jews today feel uncomfortable with traditional descriptions of punishments in the world to come. But the main point of these descriptions is that sin is hateful in God's eyes. It is better to live the good life, and God has given sufficient guidance and help for that.

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF TORAH

How can we start living *real* life? Where are meaning and healing to be found? The Jewish tradition recognizes the tension between what humans are supposed to do according to God's design of creation and what humans actually do in their daily lives. Humans inevitably fall short of what God asks of them. Jews know from the biblical history that time after time human failure brings forth divine punishment. So what can one do to find whole life, to transform this human situation?

God as Redeemer

Jews first of all look to God not only as the creator but also as the redeemer, who forgives and restores and, thus, makes it possible for humans to turn back to the life God intended for them. In the traditional daily morning prayer, after praising God as the creator and the revealer of Torah, and after pledging themselves anew to God by repeating the Shema, Jews call upon God as the redeemer, the one who saves and delivers them.

> True it is that you are the Lord our God and our fathers' God, our ruler and our fathers' ruler, our redeemer and our fathers' redeemer, our maker, the rock of our salvation, our deliverer and rescuer. Your name is everlasting; there is no God but you. . . .
>
> From Egypt you redeemed us, O Lord our God, and from the house of bondage you delivered us. You killed all their firstborn, and you redeemed your firstborn. You parted the Red Sea and drowned the proud, but you made the precious ones to pass through. . . . The beloved ones lauded and praised God, . . . who brings low the proud and raises the humble, who frees the captives and redeems the meek, who helps the poor and answers his people when they cry out to him for help. . . . O Rock of Israel, arise to the help of Israel, and deliver Judah and Israel as you promised. Our redeemer, Lord of Hosts is his name, Israel's holy one. Blessed are you, O Lord, who has redeemed Israel.

In this prayer, Jews look to the great redemption of Israel in the past, and they look ahead to the redemption in the time to come. But redemption also takes place in the present—whenever God humbles the proud and raises the lowly, whenever God helps the needy and hears the people's call. Redemption or salvation takes place in common everyday events.

How does God redeem? Not through an intermediary who stands between God and humans to save them, as in Christian views. Between God and humans stands no one. As Steinberg writes, "As nothing comes between soul and body, father and child, potter and vessel, so nothing separates man from God, Soul of his soul, his Father and Fashioner."[6] God redeems and saves by being God for humans. That is, God continually searches and calls for humans to become partners as they were created to be.

In this search of God for humans, Jews identify a number of important movements on God's part. God intervenes in human history to redeem the sacred people by mighty acts. God reveals the Torah as the total design for the good life. And God answers humans when they repent by showing them mercy and forgiveness. Yet God does not take away human freedom and initiative. The searching and calling come from God, but ultimately each person must take the first step of responding to God's call.

The Jewish sacred story is full of God's mighty acts of salvation. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt with a mighty arm. God brought them to the holy mountain and entered into a covenant with them, giving them the Torah. God led them into the promised land and gave it to them as an inheritance, raising up the house of David to save Israel from its enemies. Even God's acts of punishment were intended as a means of redeeming the people from their sins and turning them back to the right path. In the midst of the great catastrophe of the Babylonian exile, the prophet known as Second Isaiah spoke these words about the destruction of Israel and God's intentions for them:

> Comfort, oh comfort my people, says your God.
> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and call to her
> that her time of service is fulfilled,
> that her iniquity is satisfied,
> that she has received from the Lord double for all her sins. . . .
> See, the Lord God comes with might, with his arm ruling for him;
> indeed, his reward comes with him,
> and his recompense is before him.
> Like a shepherd he will pasture his flock,

he will gather them in his arm;
he will carry the lambs in his bosom,
and lead the ewes to water.

(Isaiah 40:1–2, 10–11)

Through mighty deeds of salvation, God has always been the redeemer of the people and will continue so in the present and in the future.

The Jewish tradition also stresses the guidance that God has given to make it possible for humans to turn and lead the good life. This is the Torah, the great gift of God's grace for the welfare of humankind. In a sense, giving the Torah is the one great act of God's salvation for humankind. The Jewish daily prayer celebrates this blessing of revelation:

> You have loved us with abounding love, O Lord our God, and you have shown us great and overflowing tenderness. Our father, our ruler, for the sake of our fathers, who trusted in you and to whom you taught the laws of life, so have mercy on us and teach us. Our father, merciful father, show us mercy and inspire us to understand and discern, to mark, learn, and teach, to keep and do and fulfill in love all the teachings of your Torah. Enlighten our eyes in your Torah, and draw our hearts near to you with your commandments.

As God has taught and guided the people of old in the laws of life, so Jews believe God continues to teach and guide, giving the will to study the Torah, the mind to understand it, and the heart to follow it.

The Human Movement of Repentance

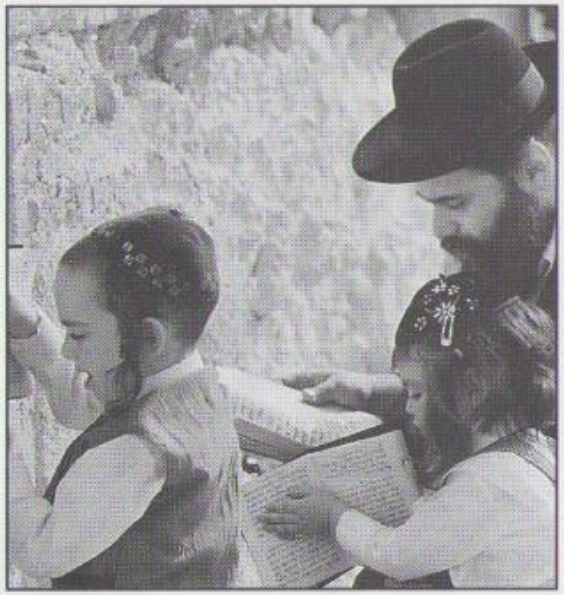
So far it does sound as though salvation comes mainly from God's side. And in a sense it does, for God is the redeemer. But Jews also insist that the human partner in this relationship likewise has an active role in this process of salvation and transformation. God created humans with an important realm of free will within the various conditions of life over which we have no control. And in this realm of moral freedom, the drama of faithfulness or faithlessness is played out. A rabbi taught that before a human is conceived in his mother's womb, God has already ordained concerning him whether he be strong or weak, intelligent or dull, rich or poor. But God has not predetermined whether he will be wicked or virtuous, since everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven (*Ber.* 33b).[7] God is in search for humans, but it is up to humans to seek God. Jews believe that the initiative in seeking God must come from the human side. Abraham Heschel, quoting the saying, "Whoever sets out to purify himself is assisted from above" (*Yoma* 38b), comments simply: "God concludes but we commence."[8] God gives grace, calls us, searches for us—but God expects us to take the first step in responding to the call.

Within the human life of imperfection and sin, that first step toward God has to be repentance. The Hebrew word for repentance, *teshuvah*, literally means to "turn around," to make a complete change in one's direction of life. To turn to God means to answer the call, to respond to God's search and set out on the path of the good life of Torah. Through the prophet Malachi comes God's call: "Since your fathers' days you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7).

Repentance is a human act, not a mysterious sacrament that works even without our efforts. This human undertaking of repentance involves four concrete steps, according to the rabbis. First comes the readiness to acknowledge a wrongdoing. Second, the person does acts of compensation for the injury inflicted on others by what he or she has done, when it is a sin against others. Third, the person makes a genuine resolve to avoid a repetition of the same sinful deed. Only then is the person ready to take the fourth and final step of praying for forgiveness from God, knowing that he or she will receive God's mercy.

Repentance is the highest of the virtues in Judaism. The rabbis taught that when a person repents out of love, his or her sins are converted into merits, and that in the place where a repentant sinner stands, even the righteous who have never sinned cannot stand (*Ber.* 34b). Reflecting on this philosophical puzzle, Joseph Albo (d. 1444) pointed out that if justice were to be the determining factor there could be no repentance at all, for justice demands that, once done, a wrong cannot be righted and the sinner must be punished. But repentance is based on God's infinite grace. When a person sincerely repents and turns to God in love, the person is really demonstrating that the sin was not committed voluntarily but in error, for the sinner would erase it if he or she could. This repentance out of love brings God's grace into play, which flows in love to the person and converts his or her sins into merits.[9]

One of the most holy days in Judaism, **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement), is set aside for repentance. The liturgy used on this day in the Jewish synagogue strikingly expresses



A Jewish family prays at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

To say this prayer with conviction and sincerity means turning back to God and following God's way; it is a prayer for transformation.

On the Path of Transformation

Repentance is only the first step. The path of transformation for Jews is really the whole life of Torah. This means following the **mitzvot** (commandments), which God has given through the Torah as the discipline by which to purify oneself and shape one's life ever more closely to God's design. There are many mitzvot, 613 of them by traditional count, made up of 365 negative commandments corresponding to the number of days in the year, and 248 positive commandments corresponding to the number of members of a person's body. How these mitzvot apply to life is set forth in the Jewish **Halakhah**, the "way," the code of life spelled out in the Talmud. The Halakhah determines the way a person lives, how one shapes the daily routine into a pattern of holiness. The Halakhah governs every aspect of daily life, all the way from birth to death. It includes prescriptions about how to relate to God in prayer and in worship, what foods to eat and how to prepa

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 In what ways was the religion of the ancient Israelites polytheistic and henotheistic? Outline the development of monotheism.
2 What is the Shema, and why is it so important for Jews?
3 Discuss how, in Jewish experience, God is both transcendent and immanent in the world.
4 What are some responses to the problem of evil and suffering according to Jewish thought? What is the impact of the Holocaust on this question for modern Jews?
5 What does the creation liturgy of Genesis I reveal about the nature of the world and of humans?
6 Is the Torah universal truth? What is the traditional idea about the Seven Commandments of the Children of Noah? What is the fate of people who are not Jews?
7 What is the rabbinic tradition about the good and evil inclinations? What perspective does this place on the question of the sinfulness of humans?
8 In the Jewish path of transformation, what are the roles of God and of humans?
9 Describe the four steps of repentance, as taught by the rabbis.
10 Abraham Heschel says that "the true goal for man is *to be* what he *does*." What does he mean by this, and how does this relate to the discipline of Halakhah?

Chapter 8

Ritual Practices and the Good Life for Jews

JEWISH RITUALS AND WORSHIP

How can we find new power for life? How can we stay in touch with the divine? For Jews, the Torah provides the basis for making human life sacred. There are mitzvot (commandments) dealing with both ritual actions and with ethical behavior, creating sacred times and sacred living. Traditional Jews keep both types of mitzvot; modern Jews sometimes tend to keep the spirit of ethical directives but not all the ritual and ceremonial laws.

Only the basic mitzvot are mentioned in the written Torah. On the basis of the oral Torah, the Talmud, with its interpretations and applications of the written Torah, rabbis over many centuries have compiled the Halakhah, the "path" or code that provides the blueprint for everything about life, daily, seasonally, from cradle to grave. Since the Halakhah is so all-encompassing, it is difficult to make a sharp division between worship and the good life. Jews have, however, made a general distinction between ritual–ceremonial laws, on the one hand, and ethical laws, on the other. First, we focus on the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism.

Sabbaths for Rest, Festivals for Rejoicing

Jews have a rich tradition of sacred times. The rituals and festivals provide a rhythm of return to the source of sacred power, daily, weekly, and seasonally.

Queen Sabbath At the very center of Jewish life is Shabbat (Sabbath), the only festival prescribed in the Ten Commandments. Sabbath has been extremely important to Jewish life and identity. The Sabbath, say Jews, has kept Israel more than Israel has kept the Sabbath. It is the supreme symbol of the covenant relationship with God.

The Torah provides two important interpretations of the Sabbath, in the two listings of the Ten Commandments. According to Exodus 20, Jews are commanded to rest on the Sabbath because God rested on the seventh day after finishing the creation. In Deuteronomy 5, resting on the Sabbath day is a reminder of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Thus, the Sabbath means rejoicing with God in the creation, and it means celebrating freedom in human society. Because of this, Sabbath has always been considered a joyous time by the Jews, a time of worship, prayer, and study, but also a time of family gathering, festive meal, rest from labor and worry, and giving rest to animals also. It is a festival of worshiping God and respecting human values.

The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday evening and ends at sundown on Saturday evening. Jews prepare for the Sabbath celebration by cleaning house and getting the meals ready—for such work is not permitted on the Sabbath. At sundown the mother of the family lights two candles, says the Sabbath prayer, and "Queen Shabbat" comes. Friday evening is the time for the Sabbath family meal, often with a special guest or two. During the meal the special Sabbath prayer (Kiddush) is said over a glass of wine. In modern times, Friday evening is the occasion for a communal Sabbath service at the synagogue. Jews traditionally spent Saturday morning at the synagogue worshiping and studying the Torah. Nowadays Saturday is spent in rest and quiet with family and friends. As the end of Sabbath approaches on Saturday evening, Jews use special prayers and rituals to bid farewell to Queen Sabbath.

The Days of Awe: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur The Jewish year begins with the Days of Awe, also called the High Holy Days. They start with **Rosh Hashanah**, New Year, on the first of Tishri, coming in early autumn in the modern calendar. These are considered the most solemn days of the year. They symbolize death and renewal—the old is swept away and the new is put into place. Sins are forgiven, relationships mended, and people are sealed in God's books of life. Jewish tradition has it that everything a person does is recorded in God's books, and these are opened for examination at the beginning of the New Year to be weighed and judged and the verdict inscribed. One book is for the just, and another book is for the hopeless sinners. But the third book—for those who are in between—is not sealed until Yom Kippur, giving people a chance to repent.

The solemn liturgy of the Rosh Hashanah synagogue service has the main theme of God as King, the one who created the world: "This is the day the world was born." God the King continues to renew the creation and is also

temple service. The concluding service on Yom Kippur is called Neilah (closing), referring to the closing of the gates of heaven, a reminder that time for repentance is running out. The ark holding the Torah scrolls is left open to the end of the service; people stand throughout the service—heightening the sense of urgency of reaching God with prayers. The service concludes dramatically with a final blast of the shofar signaling passage from sin to forgiveness, from death to life.

Sukkot: The Festival of Booths Just five days after Yom Kippur, on the fifteenth of Tishri, **Sukkot** represents a quick shift in mood to a holiday of celebration. The Festival of Booths lasts for seven days, during which Jews build a hut (*sukkah*) and make it their home, at least symbolically. Sukkot was the festival of ingathering of harvest, and appropriately the festival includes the ritual use of citron, palm branches, myrtle, and willow. The frail temporary hut in which the family dines reminds Jews of the wandering in the wilderness; it

oil and the Jewish fight for independence. Jews light the eight candles successively on the eight nights of Hanukkah. It is a season of joy, games, special foods, and gift-giving. The festival symbolizes the sanctity of the individual's conscience and the right of everyone to choose his or her own religious practices.

Purim, coming in early spring, commemorates the survival of the Jewish people told in the story of Esther. The wicked Haman of the Persians masterminded the extermination of the Jews, but Mordecai and his grandniece Esther risked their lives to save their people. Purim has a carnival atmosphere as the story of the wicked Haman and the heroes Mordecai and Esther is told and acted out. The festival includes plays, masquerades, and games of chance, and even some social drinking is permissible. Purim is also a time for acts of righteousness.

Pesach (Passover) Passover (Pesach) is one of the high points of the Jewish year, coming at the beginning of spring (in March or April). Since it celebrates Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, it is "the festival of our freedom." It has elements that were originally connected with spring festivals of both pastoralists and agriculturalists, but most importantly it is the festival by which Jews are commanded to remember God's intervention in Egypt and the deliverance of the people from bondage. As a spring festival, it also symbolizes the deliverance of all nature from the bondage of winter. A major message of the festival is that the Jews were delivered from Egypt not just for their own sake but also for the sake of promoting freedom for all enslaved peoples. There is, thus, a note of anticipation in the Passover celebration, looking to the future deliverance of Israel and all peoples.

Preparing for Passover involves a thorough cleaning and purifying of the house, getting rid of all traces of *hametz* (leaven) and storing all utensils used for the rest of the year. Only *matzah* (unleavened bread) and other unleavened food can be eaten for the seven-day festival, for the Israelites fled in haste from Egypt and ate unleavened bread for seven days.

Passover is primarily a family festival. The focus is on the ritual meal called the *seder* (order) celebrated in the evenings of the first two days, during which the story of the Exodus from Egypt is told in word, song, and ritual. The procedure for the seder is written in a guide called the Haggadah (story). The seder includes four cups of wine to remember the redemption of Israel; a special cup for Elijah, the herald of the future redemption; salt water to remember the tears of the ancestors; drops of wine spilt in sorrow over the plagues the Egyptians experienced; and four questions to be asked by the youngest child present. Passover is a celebration of new life and freedom, a season of rebirth and renewal.

Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) The final major festival, **Shavuot**, seven weeks after Passover, originated as a celebration of abundant spring harvest. It remembers especially the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, God's great gift to Israel, the heart of the covenant bond between God and people. Shavuot is a festival of reconsecration to the teaching of the Torah and to the covenant. A beautiful metaphor used on Shavuot is that of marriage between God and people: Passover is the time of courting, Shavuot celebrates the marriage, and Sukkot is the setting up of the household.

For Shavuot, Jews often decorate the synagogue and home with green plants, branches, and trees. The story about the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai is read. Some Jews stand at the reading of the Ten Commandments and even read them in a special chant. In Israel, the recent custom of bringing the first fruits of the harvest in joyful processions is performed on Shavuot. And many synagogues, especially Reform and Conservative ones, have confirmation ceremonies on Shavuot, celebrating graduating from religious school and attesting to the covenant given at Sinai.

There are other Jewish holy days, fast days, and celebrations, of course. An important recent addition is Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, observed in April as a memorial to the six million Jewish martyrs of the Nazi era. Significantly, some Christian churches also observe Yom Hashoah.

Mitzvot of Ritual and Worship

The performance of the ritual duties is not limited to the holy days and festivals in Judaism. Since all of life is to be made holy, ceremonial observances in worship of God extend to all of life. They include worship and prayer, daily

A Jewish family celebrates Passover through the ritual of the seder, a liturgy telling the story of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

rituals at home, observance of dietary laws, and ceremonies associated with the passages of life.

Worship, Prayer, and Study The duty of worshiping God is at the heart of the Jewish tradition, as it is also for Christianity and Islam. In ancient times, worship at the temple included prayer and rituals of sacrifice, but since the destruction of the temple, the focus has been on prayer. Traditional Jews live their lives constantly aware of the presence of God, always ready to utter words of praise and blessing to God. Jewish prayer can be spontaneous, arising from the longings of the heart. But the rabbis, knowing that we can easily forget a parent who is absent, specified periods during the day for worship. They created a tradition of prayer that blends together a fixed liturgy and the spontaneous offerings of the heart.

Important to Jews is the prayer book, a composite of Jewish worship experience from ancient times up to the present. The prayer book specifies the exact times for prayer and even provides the prayers to use on all important occasions. In recent times, prayer books have been translated into the vernacular languages. The Reform movement in particular has modernized the prayers and provided translations. Yet the general shape of liturgical prayer remains.

Jewish prayers presuppose a community. The plural form is used, and prayer ideally is said in a congregational setting where there is a *minyan*, a quorum of ten. Each prays by himself or herself but is fully aware of the community. Traditional congregational prayer would involve a group of men in a room, each standing by himself yet close to others, some swaying this way and that, whispering or speaking in a low tone to God. Standing before God the king, they do not shuffle their feet unseemingly. They bend their knees when they begin and when they end in honor of God's presence.

Respect for God also requires proper attire for worship. Orthodox and Conservative men wear a *kipah* or *yarmulke* (cap) during prayer. For festival worship, many wear a *tallith* (prayer shawl), and some very pious ones wear a special undergarment with fringes on the four corners. Observant Jewish men will also wear *tefillin* (phylacteries), small black boxes containing words of the Torah, attached to the forehead and arm with leather bands.

Important among these prayers are the Eighteen Benedictions, to be said in the morning, noon, and evening prayers. They have to do with themes of repentance, redemption, healing and blessing, gathering of the exiles, redemption of Jerusalem and Israel, thankfulness, and the like.

The act of studying the Torah is also an important ritual for Jews—in fact, it has been said that it is the central ritual of the Jewish tradition. Whereas Jews, of course, study the Torah to gain intellectual knowledge, the act itself of studying is a holy ritual in which one is united with the rabbis and even with God in stud[redacted]

God gave them, obeying them is a sign of keeping the covenant. They have preserved the uniqueness of the Jewish people throughout their tumultuous history, keeping them from being assimilated into other peoples. Keeping kashrut is a ritual that preserves the Jew's sense of communal identity with other Jews.

The question of the observance of the dietary laws is, of course, answered quite differently by various groups of Jews today. Traditional Jews observe all the laws without compromising and with rejoicing. Others observe kashrut at home but not outside. Some observe the laws selectively,

A boy's bar mitzvah is a joyous celebration for family and friends, as the boy becomes an adult member of the Jewish community. Here the thirteen-year-old boy opens presents.

taken his place as a responsible adult in the Jewish people. Recently in Reform and Conservative congregations, this puberty ritual has also been extended to girls, being called in this case **bat mitzvah**, daughter of the commandment.

The sacred duty of marriage in Judaism is spelled out in many passages of the Talmud, for it is a supreme mitzvah for the survival of the covenant people. Indeed it is suggested in the Talmud that one who remains unmarried impairs the divine image (*Yeb.* 63b). One rabbi, when asked what God has been doing since the creation of the world, replied that God has been sitting on the divine throne and making matches, assigning this man to that woman, this woman to that man, and so on (*Gen Rabbah* 68:4). The wedding ritual sanctifies the marriage, which is performed under a *huppah* (canopy). There are blessings over two goblets of wine, and the groom places a ring on the bride's finger with the words, "Be consecrated to me with this ring as my wife, according to the law of Moses and the faith of Israel." The marriage contract is read, seven wedding benedictions are chanted, and the bridegroom breaks a glass with his foot in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem—a reminder of sorrow on this occasion of joy. With shouts of "Mazel tov!" (good luck), the wedding celebration begins for this new household in Israel.

The rituals of death focus realistically on this common end of all mortal life, rejoicing in the life that God had granted and reflecting hope for the world to come. Orthodox Jews believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead in the world to come, whereas more modern Jews take an agnostic view of the life beyond. In any case, great importance is placed on the respectful burial of the dead. In traditional Jewish communities, the burial society is a most highly respected group. Members sit with the dying person, offering prayers and reciting the Shema, the last mitzvah for a dying Jew. Jewish law forbids embalming the body; it should return quickly to the dust. The body is thoroughly washed and dressed in a white shroud. Before the burial service, the mourners tear their garments. The service concludes with the recitation of the Kaddish, a doxology sanctifying God's name. The initial period of mourning is the *shivah* (seven days), followed by another period of mourning until thirty days after the burial. Special prayers are also said on the annual anniversary of the death.

Healing and Medicine Among Jews

From biblical times, Jews have considered health and well-being of the body to be a religious concern. The central perspective is that the body was created by God and, thus, belongs to God, who loans it to the person for a lifetime. So the rabbis put forth many teachings about the duty to keep one's body clean and healthful. If a person rents an apartment, his or her duty is not to destroy it but to maintain it

in good care, and so it is with one's body. So Jewish law prohibits suicide or any action that might harm and desecrate the body. In fact, Jewish law requires a person to do everything possible to preserve life and health, even breaking any of the commandments (except the prohibitions against murder, idolatry, and incest) if that is necessary. Maimonides, who was both a rabbi and a physician, wrote that it is a legal obligation for Jews to maintain physical health and vigor, through the right kinds of food, exercise, and hygiene, "in order to have a healthy body with which to serve God" (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Ethics*, 3:3).

Jews, of course, engaged in many traditional healing practices, including wearing amulets, receiving blessings from rabbis and holy men, performing ritual actions, praying, blood-letting, use of herbs, and the other traditional measures of their times. But in the medieval period, Jewish physicians enthusiastically participated in the medical advances, making their own contributions to the scientific principles of medicine that Arab physicians were developing. Joseph Caro, author of the *Shulkan 'Aruk*, stated that the Torah gave physicians permission to heal and save life and that, in fact, withholding their services would be like shedding blood (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:1). Consequently, Jewish physicians were obligated to heal non-Jews as well as Jews. So important was the practice of medicine that the rabbis prohibited Jews from living in a city where there was no physician.

The obligation of Jews to practice healing extends to the laypeople as well, according to the rabbis. They are to provide any kind of needed assistance to those who are sick and to pray for them and, above all, they are to visit the sick as a means of helping the healing process—not to do this is like shedding blood. In medieval times, many Jewish communities had organized visiting societies, a practice that is increasingly being adopted again by modern congregations.

In modern times, Jewish people have for the most part been eager proponents of modern medicine, establishing hospitals and supporting medical research. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in spiritual healing practices as supplemental to modern medicine. The contemporary Jewish healing movement reaches back to earlier traditions to emphasize the communal nature of health, establishing synagogue-based healing services and rituals, social services for the elderly and chronically ill, small group healing rituals, and the like. Some of these practices are shared with other faith traditions, such as meditation, prayer, guided visualizations, holding hands, and so on. But the healing practices emphasize a sense of rootedness in the Jewish tradition by the use of Hebrew, reading of Jewish texts and stories, and playing and singing Jewish music. These healing practitioners often say that this is not about *curing* but about *healing*. People should go to doctors and hospitals for curing, but real healing is something more. Of course, sometimes curing is not possible, but healing is always possible, for healing comes by drawing on Jewish resources and the Jewish community to foster a sense of identity, strength, purpose, and meaning in life.

The fundamental Jewish sense that the body belongs to God still has much influence on the way observant Jews consider contemporary issues in medicine. For example, artificial insemination involving husband and wife would be all right, but Orthodox rabbis would prohibit anyone but the husband from donating sperm, since that could fall under laws prohibiting adultery or incest. Abortion generally is frowned on, except for preserving the life and health of the mother. Likewise, active euthanasia and assisted suicide are prohibited, yet letting the person die a timely death without prolonging suffering is encouraged. Care of the body extends beyond death, of course, and cremation is prohibited since it involves desecration and destruction of the body. Many rabbis would allow donation of organs, since that honors rather than desecrates the body.

Artistic Expression in Jewish Religious Life

Basic Jewish sensitivities about God, the world, and human life are evident in the art created in Jewish communities the world over, from ancient times to the present. The Jewish aesthetic sense was strongly influenced by the Torah's prohibition against making images of any living thing, a corollary of the oneness and uniqueness of God. Because of this, Jews have generally avoided any representations of God and saintly personages, and traditionally they have given little attention to representational art in general. Instead, the literary and decorative art forms have flourished.

This reservation about representational art has not been a monolithic, unchanging attitude, however. There is evidence of some Jewish pictorial art using human figures in certain periods of Jewish history, especially in the Hellenistic era and

in manuscript decorations during the medieval period. The synagogue at Dura-Europos in Syria, dating from about 245 C.E., is most striking in its lavish artistic portrayals, including human faces and forms. Five horizontal bands of decorative and figural paintings entirely cover the inside wall of the synagogue. Besides decorations of animals and theater masks, the paintings include scenes of well-known biblical episodes, such as the exodus from Egypt, the finding of Moses, the anointing of David, and so forth. The art of book illumination with beautiful decorations and figures reached high form during the later medieval period, with artists showing great creativity in decorating and drawing scenes for books, especially for the Passover Haggadah.

In the modern period, of course, there have been and are well-known Jewish painters who create art based on Jewish themes. Many famous Jewish artists in the nineteenth century included painters Camille Pissarro, Jozef Israels, and Leopold Horowitz, and in the twentieth century the well-known Paris School of Art included a large number of Jewish painters. To sense the vibrancy of modern Jewish art, one need only mention Marc Chagall, who has expressed the spiritual themes of the Jewish tradition in many of his paintings and stained glass windows. In Israel today, a kind of Jewish national art has developed, reflecting in some sense the new Jewish identity in the Holy Land.

Although they traditionally steered away from representational art, the other arts have been fully developed in the Jewish tradition. Jews have devoted much artistic energy to what might very generally be called the aesthetics of the word: literature, poetry, prayers, psalms, liturgies, calligraphy, and manuscript decoration. An impressive Jewish literature has developed, in Hebrew and the Hebraeo dialects such as Yiddish and Ladino, and also in the various other languages of the world. Jewish writers in every century created stories and parables, poetry, short stories, novels, plays, mystical treatises, and philosophical essays, to give diverse expression to the experience of being part of the long Jewish story.

The Talmud states that the glorification of God should use all the finest objects for worship. In keeping with that attitude, in all historical ages Jewish artists have devoted much time, expense, and artistic creativity to making various ritual objects to use in worshiping God. Besides manuscripts and Torah scrolls written in beautiful calligraphy and exquisitely decorated, Jewish artists have created beautiful ornaments and crowns for Torah scrolls, kiddush cups, seder plates, Sabbath lamps, embroidered brocades for ark curtains or wrappings for Torah scrolls, and much more.

The Psalms say that everything that has breath should praise the Lord, and Jews have excelled in the arts of music, songs, dancing, and the like. It is true that, after the destruction of the temple, rabbinic custom excluded the use of musical instruments in synagogue worship, except for the shofar (ram's horn). The exclusion of musical instruments served to heighten the emphasis on the text, for which forms of chanting were developed. Dancing was also avoided in some periods, but in traditional places like Yemen, religious dancing is a part of festivals like Simhat Torah, circumcision, weddings, and the like. In modern times, however, choreographers have created dance and ballet inspired by Jewish history, ritual, and music. And many of the most recognized performing musicians, composers, and conductors today are of Jewish heritage, drawing deeply from their Jewish tradition as they interpret and help to create the musical arts of the modern world.

The ancient temple in Jerusalem was a magnificent architectural creation, designed according to a heavenly divine model; its function was to be a sacred place of divine presence, a meeting point between God and humans. In the Jewish tradition, the architecture of the synagogue, the primary meeting place for prayer and study, has been cultivated in keeping with its meaning and function. Unlike temples of ancient times or in other religions, the synagogue is designed to contain all the worshipers, not just the priests. And the focus is not outward from the center of divine power toward the people but inward toward the center of prayer and study. The synagogue took different forms in different parts of the world, but everywhere the architecture expresses the centrality of the bimah, the altar with the Torah scrolls—the center of Judaism.

THE LIFE OF TORAH: JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ETHICS

How should we live? To the Jew this question has never been difficult to answer. A Jew should live as one who belongs to the *kelal yisrael*, the total community of Israel, following the laws given by God in the Torah. The sense of Jewish peoplehood has remained strong since ancient times. Though difficult to define or explain, belonging to

the Jewish people still provides deep identity and meaning today for traditional practicing Jews and modern secular Jews alike.

The Jewish People

How does one become a member of the Jewish people? Basically, one is a member of the Jewish people either by birth or by conversion. According to Jewish law, a person is a Jew by birth if his or her mother is Jewish. Recently, Reform Judaism has extended this provision to include either parent, so long as the family shows the intention to raise their children in the Jewish religion. One who is a Jew by birth can never be deprived of that identity, even if he or she completely abandons Jewish practices. The symbolic entry into the Jewish people for boys born in a Jewish home is the ritual of circumcision, performed on the eighth day after birth as the sign of the covenant.

Even though Jews do not seek to gain converts, in every age there have been persons who by their own choice have become Jewish. Such a person, traditionally called a "proselyte," is welcomed into the Jewish community by rituals of circumcision (for males) and a ritual bath (*mikveh*). When a non-Jew becomes convinced that she or he wants to be Jewish and persists in doing so (Jewish tradition says the rabbi is to discourage potential proselytes and yield only if they persist), they become of equal rank and status as a Jew by birth.

It is not an easy matter, then, to answer the question, "Who is a Jew?" It does not depend on race, color, or nationality, for among Jews may be found people of all races, colors, and nationalities, and none is excluded. It may perhaps be said that a Jew is one who, whether by birth or by conversion, has taken on the identity of the covenant people of God, choosing to be different from all other peoples of the world by this unique role.

As a sacred people, Jews do not have any tight structure or organization. Rather, the people of God function as a kind of extended family, gathered into communities in various parts of the world, helping and encouraging one another to live the life of Torah. Wherever they live, Jews form congregations, gathering in local synagogues for study and worship. The congregation is governed by the people, especially those recognized as elders and scholars. Ever since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in about 70 C.E., Jews have had no priests as religious leaders. Rather, religious leaders are those who are most learned in the Torah and Talmud, that is, the rabbis. Traditionally, a rabbi is one who has received ordination from other rabbis in recognition of his knowledge of the Law, qualifying him to be a leader and judge for a community of Jews.

There is no worldwide organization that governs the whole Jewish people. Rather, Jews in various lands tend to develop their own structures of organization, including both religious organizations and philanthropic groups. In the state of Israel, the Ministry of Religious Affairs recognizes the Orthodox chief rabbinate as the authority in matters of Jewish religious law. In America, there are four organizations that set the standards for Jewish rabbis and the congregations they serve: the Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist groups. Orthodox Jews try as much as possible to maintain Jewish life and ritual according to the traditional Jewish Law, whereas Conservative Jews have adapted somewhat more to the demands of modern life. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews have changed or replaced certain elements of the Jewish Law to meet the needs of modern times; for example, they ordain women as rabbis—a practice that Conservative Jews have also finally adopted.

Women in Religious Leadership The ordination of women in some of the modern Jewish groups in America is a significant moment in the long story of women in Judaism. Although women have always been highly esteemed in the Jewish community, they have seldom played leadership roles and traditionally were limited to activities in the home—a role that was accepted as important and not inferior to men's roles. But Judaism has always been a patriarchal religion, back to father Abraham, and women are little represented in the sacred texts and in the significant historical events as these were preserved in Jewish memory. Some images of women in the Bible and in Jewish tradition are clearly negative and subordinate to men. Biblical laws, for example, presume women to be the property of their fathers and husbands. The rabbis talked of women as inferior to men, not permitted to be judges, rabbis, or cantors. Women were segregated from men in synagogues, not counted toward the religious quorum (minyan), not expected to study Torah, and unacceptable as witnesses in court. In the traditional daily prayer, a Jewish man would pray, "I thank Thee, God, for not having made me a woman."

But that is only one side of the picture. The Hebrew Bible also presents surprisingly strong women in leadership roles, models that Jewish women are recovering today. There is Sarah, ancestress of Israel, powerfully present in the sacred story with Abraham even when the patriarchal memory glosses over her role. Miriam, sister of Moses, was called "the prophetess" and led the Israelite women in a bold dance of victory after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20). Deborah was a prophetess who judged Israel, accompanied Barak to battle against a king of the Canaanites, and is said to have sung a mighty victory song that is recognized as one of the oldest surviving examples of Hebrew poetry (Judges 4:4–14). The Book of Ruth tells the heartwarming story of two women, Ruth (a non-Israelite) and her mother-in-law Naomi, who carry on their family line, with Ruth becoming an ancestress of King David. The Jewish woman Esther became queen of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, and heroically saved her Jewish people from destruction (Book of Esther).

Even in medieval times, countless Jewish women, untold but always there, took on strong family responsibilities in trade, financial management, and travel, while Jewish men were often occupied with duties of study and ritual. That inner strength started to become more public in modern times. Henrietta Szold, for example, lobbied for equality for Jewish women in the 1890s, studied at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and helped to found the network that became the Hadassah Medical Organization in Israel. Internationally known was Golda Meir, strong political leader and premier of Israel in the 1970s. Today many Jewish women are in the forefront of religious leadership, and Jewish women are developing new interpretations of traditional practices as well as finding ways to break out of the old patriarchal system altogether.[1]

The Life of Halakhah

What is the good life that we should live? Jews use the term *Halakhah* to designate that code of laws that prescribes how a Jew should live every aspect of life. Halakhah literally means "way," and it is a total way of life, drawn from the Torah and the Talmud. In traditional Jewish thinking, the Halakhah is the revealed will of God and, therefore, the ultimate criterion for all human conduct. A number of collections and systematizations of the Halakhah exist, but a most famous and influential one is the *Shulhan 'Aruk* (*The Set Table*) made by Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488–1575). This brief four-part code of Jewish law has been expanded through commentaries and supercommentaries but even today is the place Jewish discussions of law begin. The opening sentence, elaborated by commentators, is famous:

> A man should make himself strong and brave as a lion to rise in the morning for the service of his Creator, so that he should "awake the dawn" (*Psalm* 57:9). . . . "I have set the Lord always before me" (*Psalm* 16:8). This is a cardinal principle in the Torah and in the perfect ways of the righteous who walk before God.[2]

That is, all our actions should be infused with the radical awareness that we are in every moment acting in the presence of God and, therefore, that every detail of our actions is important.

The Discipline of Halakhah The Jewish tradition speaks of reward and punishment for deeds, but it would be a misunderstanding to see the performance of the mitzvot in this light. The commandments are to be performed for their own sake, not for the sake of reward. There are, of course, resulting benefits to self and others in doing the commandments, but fundamentally it is the act itself that carries value and goodness. Abraham Heschel has likened the Halakhah to artistic creation; works of piety are like works of art, serving a functional purpose but carrying the most important value intrinsically.[3]

A way of understanding the significance of performing the Halakhah is to see that, as Heschel said, the true goal for a person is to be what he does. We are what we do. The law provides a structure of life and a discipline, in harmony with God's design, and it is in following that structure and practicing that discipline, with its required rituals and actions, that people express their identity as Jews and as humans.

A basic idea of Jewish ethics is that what God has made is good—but not perfect. The distinction and obligation of humans are that they can improve what God has made. The divine image is in humans and, therefore, they can, if they will, transform this world. For that they need the guidance and the discipline of the Halakhah.

The Halakhah is not understood to be a burden; rather, it is a great joy. To Jews, the mitzvot of God's law are gifts and a sign of God's great love. The law submits all human faculties and passions to God's will, but it suppresses none. Even the passions are beneficial when controlled under God's law. In fact, God connects law with everything God loves—

and the distinguishing mark of God's people Israel is that there is not a single thing in their lives that God through the Torah has not connected with a commandment.

Enjoy the Good, Struggle Against the Evil The Halakhah is based on a positive, optimistic view of human life. Since God created all things good, humans have the obligation to enjoy and enhance life. Good food, wealth, and sexual pleasure are all gifts of God and should be enjoyed in the rightful way. It is a mitzvah, for example, to get married and raise children—Jewish law does not condone celibacy or asceticism. In general, we are commanded always to do what enhances life, for others and for ourselves, such as acts of kindness to others, keeping our body clean, feeding animals, and burying the dead—all these are acts of ethical distinction.

On the other hand, we are forbidden to do that which degrades life. Overindulgence in food and drink, lack of cleanliness, and the like degrade one's own life. Exploiting and using other people or humiliating them degrades their life together with one's own. The Halakhah contains many laws against theft, which includes underpaying the laborer, interrupting his work, deceiving by making something old look new, and the like. Further common sins against others, prohibited by the law, include things like taunting, insulting, misleading, slandering, hating or being angry, and nursing revenge.

Jewish law follows a middle way, advocating neither complete self-denial nor selfish indulgence. Even the so-called evil tendency, as we saw earlier, is a gift of God for the promotion of human good; without the passions we would not eat, marry, or work toward success. Even selfishness and competitiveness, controlled under God's law, can be beneficial. It is good and right that one should desire good food and eat it with relish. But it should be for more than just assuaging hunger. It should be done with thankfulness to God, serving as the occasion for strengthening the bonds of family and friends.

Sexual pleasure, too, is a duty in Judaism, sanctified in a marriage marked by love. Marrying and having children is a duty, but marriage is not only for the purpose of producing children. Rather the sexual act between husband and wife is the culmination of the loving relationship between the two. Abstinence from marriage is a triple sin, against the health of the body, the fulfillment of the soul, and the welfare of society. Divorce is allowed in Jewish law when the partners no longer love or care for each other—though, of course, moral and social pressure is exerted against divorce. A wife can dissolve the marriage, for example, if it took place under false pretenses, if the husband is immoral, if his profession is intolerable to her, if they are sexually incompatible, if he has blemished her reputation, if he has embarrassed or insulted her, and so forth. The husband can dissolve the marriage for similar reasons. Marriage is holy, but is not meant to be a lifetime of suffering.

Among the various principles of the Halakhah is the important principle of *tzedakah*. This is sometimes translated as "charity," since it has to do with the duty of giving to those in need. But the Hebrew word means "justice" or "righteousness"; giving to those in need is not just an emotional matter of compassion, but also it is something that is just and right. It is on the basis of justice that the Torah commanded the ancient Israelites to leave a small portion of their fields unharvested for the poor to glean. An important aspect of *tzedakah* is to guarantee the dignity and honor of those in need, even to restore independence and an honorable living to them. And, the rabbis taught, the poor man really does more for the rich man than the rich man does for the poor man (*Ruth Rabbah* 5:9). Special concern should be shown for those who cannot help themselves. A rabbinic exhortation says,

> In the future world, man will be asked, "What was your occupation?" If he reply, "I fed the hungry," then they reply, "This is the gate of the Lord; he who feeds the hungry, let him enter" (*Psalm* 118:20). So with giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, with those who look after orphans, and with those, generally, who do deeds of loving kindness. All these are gates of the Lord, and those who do such deeds shall enter within them.
>
> (*Midr. Ps.* on 118.19)[4]

Another important principle is to seek and pursue peace among members of the community. *Shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace, is thought of as the highest ethical imperative. It is so important that a person may even lie or suffer humiliation to preserve it—something not permitted under other circumstances. Patriarch Judah I said, "Great is peace, for even if the Israelites worship idols and there is peace among them, God says, 'I have no power, as it were, over them, seeing that peace is among them'" (*Gen. Rabbah, Noah*, 38:6).[5] Astonishingly, shalom takes precedence even over the most basic of all the commandments.

Whereas the outsider may be overwhelmed with the number and complexity of the Jewish commandments,

Jews have often pointed out that they all boil down to love: love for God and love for one's fellow humans. A famous story tells that a heathen once came to Rabbi Shammai and told him he would become a proselyte to Judaism if the rabbi could teach him the whole law while he stood on one foot. Rabbi Shammai drove him away. Then the heathen went to Rabbi Hillel, who received him and taught him, "What is hateful to you do not to your fellow: that is the whole Law; all the rest is explanation; go and learn" (*Sab.* 31a).[6] The Jewish path of Halakhah is an elaborate system embracing every aspect of human life, sanctifying it all and infusing it all with God's blessing, putting into concrete operation love for God and love for fellow humans.

The Missions of Peoplehood

The Chosen People of the Covenant Ever since the ancient Israelites gathered at Sinai and concluded a covenant with their God there, the term *chosen people* has been central to Jewish identity. God entered into the covenant relationship with them and gave them the gift of the Torah.

God chose Israel. But Jews know that this can be easily misunderstood by others and even by Jews. The idea is not that of a tribal God protecting and blessing the chosen people no matter what. Nor is this the idea of one people chosen to rule all others, or a people superior to all others. Again, the idea of Jews as the chosen people does not mean Jews have special rank and privileges before God that other peoples do not have. The sacred scriptures emphasize several important things about Israel's election as God's people. First of all, Jews were not chosen because they are better than others:

> The Lord loved you a]nd chose you not because you are more numerous than all the nations, for you are the smallest of all nations. It is because the Lord loved you and was keeping his oath which he swore to your forefathers, that the Lord brought you with a strong hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery.
>
> (Deuteronomy 7:7–8)

Second, this choice was a two-way affair: God chose Israel, but Israel chose to be chosen: "Moses came and related to the people all the words of the Lord, all his laws. And the whole people answered with one voice and said, 'All the things that the Lord told us, we will do'" (Exodus 24:3). The rabbis told how God offered the Torah to all the other nations, but all refused it. Then God gave it to Israel, who accepted it joyfully (*Sifre to Dt.* 33:2). Israel, thus, became the chosen people not simply because God chose them, but because they themselves chose to be God's people through their readiness to accept the Torah and to struggle for its truths.

Third, being the chosen people of God means that greater responsibility and higher standards of performance are demanded of the Jewish people compared to other peoples. The prophet Amos listed the punishments that will befall all the nations of the world for their particular transgressions, but he saved the harshest judgment for the chosen people: God says to Israel, "Only you have I known among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). To be God's chosen people is not something lightly to boast about; it involves heavy responsibility. God expects much more from the chosen people than from the other peoples.

Othodox rabbis in Jerusalem engage in discussion.

The term *chosen people* really means "treasured people" (*'am segullah*). Jews are God's treasure because their primary task is to be God's witness in the world, testifying that there is one God and that all people are God's children. The prophet called Second Isaiah gives this word from God:

> I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness;
> I have taken you by the hand and I have kept you.
> Now I have given you as a covenant to the people,
> a light to the nations,
> to open the eyes of the blind,
> to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons,
> those who sit in darkness from the prison.
>
> (Isaiah 42:6–7)

The Jewish people are to be God's instrument for activating the conscience of all humans to serve God in truth and justice. In Zacheriah 2:6, God says, "I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens." One rabbi pointed out that this passage does not say that Israel is spread "upon" the four winds but rather "as" the four winds; this means that, just as no place in the world is without wind, so also the world cannot exist without the people of God present everywhere (*Ta'an.* 3b).

Holy Land and State of Israel During their long history of being oppressed and scattered throughout the earth, Jews have retained a strong sense of "peoplehood." The unity and mutual responsibility of Jews is often expressed in the Talmud: "Israel's reconciliation with God can be achieved only when they are all one brotherhood" (*Men.* 27a).[7] In fact, the people of Israel form one unity through all generations. One rabbinic teaching said that when Moses summoned the people before God to make the covenant, all souls were present then, though their bodies were not yet created (*Tanh. B., Nizzabim*, 8, 25b). Especially since the great Holocaust of World War II, during which more than six million Jews were deliberately exterminated by the Nazis while much of the rest of the world did very little to come to their aid, the centrality of peoplehood for Jews has taken on new and urgent significance. Only if they care for each other, Jews feel, and take responsibility for the survival of the Jewish people will they ensure that such a Holocaust will not happen again.

The relatively recent experience of the Holocaust is part of the reason that Jews throughout the world feel such a strong commitment to the state of Israel today. The Holy Land has always been an important symbol in the Jewish identity, ever since the promises God made to Abraham and the gift of that land to the Israelite people of old. After World War II, the dream of a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land became a reality with the establishing of the state of Israel. Today Jews in every land feel the mitzvah (commandment) to guard and protect the survival of the Jewish people by maintaining the existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state in the Holy Land.

Responsibility to the World Why should there be the Jewish people among the peoples of the world? Do Jews have any kind of responsibility toward the welfare of others? The distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Jews do not abolish the universality of God's love and design for the creation. Jews do not feel compelled to try to convert others to the Jewish religion. Yet they see the ethical life of the Torah as a design that reaches out also to the non-Jews of world society. The commandments about enhancing life rather than degrading it, for example, apply to all people, not just Jews. The moral principles of the Torah are to govern societies as well as individuals.

The personal mitzvah of *tzedakah* is translated into philanthropy, devising creative ways to provide for the needs of the poor and help them regain independence and dignity. The resources of nature and of society make up a gift from God that should enhance the welfare of all people. This does not mean abolition of private property, for the law guarantees the individual the right to own what she or he has worked for and to enjoy its fruits. But no one, including governments, has the right to withhold wealth from use, to destroy it by wastefulness, or to use it selfishly against the communal interest.

Where evil rises in the society, Jews are required not only to avoid it passively but also to defy and actively protest it. The rabbis taught that a person who can protest and prevent his household from committing a sin and does not is accountable for the sins of his household. Furthermore, if he could protest and prevent his fellow citizens but fails to do so, he is accountable for the sins of the fellow citizens; and if he could keep the whole world from sinning but does not, he is accountable for the whole world (*Sab.* 54b). On the basis of their ethical principles, many Jews have been in the forefront of protesting slavery and injustice in society, advocating freedom and equality, compulsory education, rights of workers, improvement in the status of women, and other humanitarian moral changes for society.

The important mitzvah of pursuing peace (shalom) is extended to conflict and warfare between peoples and nations. The Hebrew scriptures' description of holy war in the early period, commanded by God, can perhaps be interpreted to mean that such warfare is in accordance with the divine will. But it should be remembered that those passages are balanced with other sections in the scriptures that emphasize shalom. A famous passage in Isaiah 2 says that, in the messianic age, all nations will flow to Jerusalem and beat their swords into plowshares, learning war no more (Isaiah 2:4). The rabbis pointed out that the command to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14), unlike many other commandments, does not begin with "if" or "when," to be fulfilled only on the appropriate occasion. Rather, you should seek peace wherever you happen to be, and you should run after it if it is elsewhere (*Num. Rabbah, Hukkat*, 19:27). Shalom does not just mean the absence of war, however; it expresses the health and wholeness of humans who experience equality and justice. Therefore, the Jewish approach to war and conflict has emphasized the connection between peace and justice. Noting that God told Moses to make war on Sihon, but Moses sent messengers of peace instead (Deuteronomy 2:24ff.), the Talmud says, "How great, then, must be words of peace, if Israel disobeyed God for peace's sake, and yet He was not wrath with them" (*Tanh. B., Debarim*, 3b).[8]

The Jewish tradition does not, however, advocate pacifism. The rabbis distinguished between optional war and obligatory war, which is a just war in defense against attack from outside. The right of a person to preserve his or her own life is paramount and, thus, a war of self-defense is justified. However, the rabbis taught that destructive action should be avoided if a lesser action suffices. The theme of making peace, balanced with the requirement of justice, is still characteristic of the Jewish approach today. The massive atrocities of the twentieth century require an active resistance to evil. But the threat of nuclear destruction leads some modern Jewish thinkers to conclude that ancient ideas about justified warfare are, in the modern context, a contradiction in terms.

Basic to the Jewish ethical vision, though shaken a bit by the events of the Holocaust, is the optimistic idea of transforming the world. Only humans can transform and perfect the world that God has made. Particularly in Reform Judaism, the pursuit of social justice and human fulfillment has been made into a central emphasis; Judaism's mission is to be an irresistible force for freedom and human improvement in the world. Orthodox Jews resist this kind of focus, but they also hold to the traditional teaching that, when humans repent and perform righteousness, then the messiah will come and bring in the ideal age. There is a sense in the Jewish tradition that deeds of righteousness sustain the world and keep it from disaster. Rabbi Jonathan played with the passage from Psalm 36:6, "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God; thy judgments are a great deep," transposing it to read, "Thy righteousness is over thy judgments as the mountains of God are over the great deep"; then he explained, "As these mountains press down the deep, that it should not rise and engulf the world, so the deeds of the righteous force down the punishments that they should not come upon the world" (*Pes.K.* 73b).[9]

Bringing Truth to the World As noted, the Jewish mission to the world is not conceived in terms of converting all others to Judaism. Jews certainly believe their way of Halakhah is supreme and God given, but their mission is to work with God toward a transformation of the world, a purifying and perfecting of human society.

One of the most characteristic Jewish ideas is that of the coming of the Messiah, sent by God to redeem Israel and usher in a new era in which all people will worship the one true God. Traditional Jews have always held that this will be a personal Messiah; others have thought more in terms of a messianic age of restoration that God will bring about sometime in the future. Here, we quote Louis Jacobs on this complicated topic; he writes that the basic affirmation of the expectation of the Messiah is that human history will find its culmination and fulfillment here on earth. "Ultimately, the doctrine declares, God will not abandon His world to Moral chaos. Eventually He will intercede directly in order to call a halt to tyranny, oppression and the pursuit of evil so as to restore mankind to the state of bliss here on earth. . . ." We must admit we simply do not know what will happen in the messianic age, Jacobs writes:

> We affirm our belief that God will one day intervene, that no good deed goes to waste, that the human drama will somehow find its fulfillment here on earth, that we do right to long and pray for God's direct intervention. More than this we cannot say. We must leave it to God who alone knows all secrets.[10]

Some modern Jews have found deep meaning in the teaching of the medieval Kabbalists about the "breaking of the vessels." Isaac Luria's (1534–1572) mystical vision of the creation of the world involved the idea that God withdrew

into Godself to make room for the world, then sent out divine light into this space. The light was to be preserved in special "bowls" (*sefirot*), which had been emanated from God for this purpose. But the divine light was too much for the lower vessels; they burst and were hurled down with some of the divine light. From these shards the dark forces of gross matter took substance. Now all the worlds had sunk to lower levels. But immediately after the disaster the process of restoration (*tikkun*) began, which means the restitution and reintegration of the original whole. The restoration has been almost completed by the supernal lights, but certain concluding actions have been reserved for humans. It is the human historical process and particularly its innermost soul, the religious actions of the Jews, which prepare the way for the final restitution of all the scattered and exiled lights and sparks.

For all the intricacies and strangeness of this medieval vision, it does supply a mystic model for a Jewish mission in the world: to assist God in restoring this imperfect world into the transformed world of God's purpose.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the Jewish saying that the Sabbath has kept the Jews more than the Jews have kept the Sabbath? Describe how Jews keep the Sabbath.
2. What are the main themes of the High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)?
3. What freedoms does Pesach celebrate?
4. Explain the meaning of *kashrut*. What sense do the dietary laws make for modern Jews?
5. Describe the main Jewish rites of passage at birth, puberty, marriage, and death.
6. What central religious ideas are emphasized in Jewish ideas about healing and medicine?
7. How has the prohibition of making images affected Jewish art?
8. How might one best answer the question, "Who is a Jew?"
9. Describe the role of women in traditional Jewish religious life. What models are there of strong women leaders?
10. What do Jews mean when they say marriage is a mitzvah? How would you characterize the attitude in the Halakhah toward the pleasures of life?
11. What is the "whole law" that Rabbi Hillel taughtto a heathen person while he stood on one foot? What do you think is the significance of this story?
12. What are the central meanings of the Jews being called the "chosen people"?

KEY TERMS: JUDAISM

Ba'al storm-fertility god of the ancient Canaanites
bar mitzvah ceremony in which a thirteen-year-old boy becomes an adult member of the Jewish community
bat mitzvah equivalent of bar mitzvah ceremony for girls in Reform and Conservative Jewish congregations
brit milah *see* circumcision
circumcision boys' initiation ritual that occurs on the eighth day after birth and is called brit milah (covenant of circumcision)
Conservative Judaism movement attempting to adapt Judaism to modern life by using principles of change within the traditional laws; occupies middle ground between Reform and Orthodox Judaism
covenant (berith) relationship between God and Israel, enacted on Mt. Sinai, based on Israel's acceptance of God's Torah
diaspora the dispersion of Jews away from the Jewish homeland, to live as minorities in other lands
dietary law Jewish laws pertaining to the proper preparation and eating of food, and the avoidance of certain animal food; *see* kashrut
Essenes ascetic Jewish movement around the Dead Sea area from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E.
Exile the Jewish captivity in Babylon, especially the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. until the first return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C.E.
Exodus deliverance of Israelites from Egypt under Moses' leadership
Gemara comments on the *Mishnah*; added to the *Mishnah* to form the Jewish Talmud
ghetto special Jewish quarter in certain European cities
Halakhah Jewish legal tradition based on the Talmud
Hanukkah festival of lights in December, celebrating rededication of the temple in Maccabean times
Hasidim popular mystical and devotional Jewish movement beginning in the seventeenth century in eastern Europe
Hebrews ancestors of the Israelites

Holocaust ancient Israelite ritual meaning "all-consuming sacrificial fire," used in modern times to denote the destruction of Jews and others under the Nazis

Israel "he strives with God"; name given to Jacob and thereafter to the covenant people; name of modern Jewish state

Kabbalah "tradition," especially the medieval mystical Jewish tradition, of which the *Zohar* is a central text

Karaites Jewish sect that rejected oral Torah (Talmud), relying on scripture alone

kashrut ritual fitness, suitable for use according to Jewish law; applies especially to dietary laws, what foods can and cannot be eaten, and how to prepare them

Maimonides great medieval Jewish philosopher (1135–1204 C.E.)

Marranos Spanish Jews who were outwardly Christianized but many of whom secretly continued Jewish tradition

Masada mountain fortress near the Dead Sea where Jewish Zealots made a last stand against the Romans

Mendelssohn, Moses Jewish Enlightenment thinker (1729–1786)

Messiah end-time king, descended from King David, expected to redeem Ismael

Mishnah code of Jewish oral law compiled ca. 200 C.E. by Judah the Prince; *see* Talmud

mitzvot commandments given by God

Moses leader of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt and the founding of the covenant on Mt. Sinai

Orthodox Judaism modern movement continuing a strict traditional belief in the binding character of the Torah and Halakhah

Pesach (Passover) spring festival commemorating deliverance from Egypt

Pharisees party in ancient Judaism teaching the oral Torah along with the written Torah, resurrection of the body, and application of the law in everyday life

prophets inspired people who spoke God's word and advocated reforms in Israel, especially from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C.E.; recorded words of individual prophets became part of the sacred scripture

Purim early spring festival remembering events of the Book of Esther

rabbi "my master"; title for teacher of the law; spiritual leader of a congregation

Rabbinic Judaism designation for Judaism as it developed under the teachers of the oral Torah (Talmud)

Reconstructionist Judaism modern movement founded by Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1982), emphasizing Judaism as a civilization

Reform Judaism modern movement attempting to conform tradition to conditions of modern life, allowing changes in the Halakhah

Rosh Hashanah Jewish New Year, first day of Tishri (usually in September); beginning of High Holy Days (which include Yom Kippur)

Sabbath seventh day of the week, sacred day of rest and study for Jews

Sadducees conservative party of temple priests and sympathizers in ancient Judaism who rejected the oral Torah and the idea of the resurrection

Shavuot Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), commemorating the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai

Shema statement proclaiming the unity of God, based on Deuteronomy 6:4–9, beginning, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"

Sukkot Feast of Booths, autumn harvest festival

synagogue Greek term translating Hebrew "house of assembly"; Jewish place for prayer and study

Talmud Jewish "oral Torah," comprised of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*; exists in a Palestinian and a Babylonian version

Tanakh Hebrew scriptures comprised of *Torah* (the Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Khetuvim* (the Writings)

Torah first five books in the Hebrew scriptures; also the whole of scripture; also the whole corpus of revelation, including oral Torah

Yahweh special covenant name of Israel's God as it was probably pronounced; written YHWH in the Hebrew scriptures; at a certain point Jews stopped pronouncing this sacred name and substituted the name Adonai

Yom Kippur Jewish Day of Atonement on the tenth of Tishri, a solemn day of repentance

Zealots Jewish religious party in the Roman period that advocated resistance to Roman occupation

Zionism modern movement to secure a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which led to the formation of the state of Israel

Chapter 9

Christian Sacred Story and Historical Context

In the first two centuries of its existence, Christianity was an underground, illegal religion in the Roman Empire. Today, Christianity is considered the largest of the world religions, with perhaps a billion and a half adherents in every part of the globe, in every culture, ethnic, and language group.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN STORY

Who is a Christian? A Christian is one who is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and identifies with the Christian sacred story. That story centers on the life of Jesus, as related in the Christian writings called the **gospels**. But it encompasses much more than just the story of Jesus' life. It reaches back to the sacred history of Israel as God's preparation for the fulfillment in Jesus; it includes the gathering of the Christian church after the death and resurrection of Christ; and it extends to the decisions and clarifications about Christian faith and life given in the New Testament writings and even in the decisions of the early councils of the Christian church.

Jewish Roots of the Christian Way

Jesus was a Jew. Born into a Jewish family, he lived his life practicing the Jewish way; he died and was buried a Jew. Those who followed him and formed the Christian church after his death were Jews. Thus, the Christian story begins with Judaism, with those Jews living in Palestine during the Roman occupation and looking for the way to live according to God's covenant.

The times in which Jesus lived were confused and violent. The Jewish people under oppressive Roman rule feared for their religious identity, and they developed different forms of Jewish life under these circumstances. There was a group of Jewish revolutionaries, some of them called Zealots, who were agitating for a Jewish state independent of Rome and were causing uprisings. For example, about the year 4 B.C.E., a certain Judas of Galilee led a bloody revolt against the puppet ruler Herod, king of Galilee, over the question of tribute money being paid to the Romans. They were defeated and some two thousand savagely crucified, but their revolutionary sentiments continued to be felt widely among the Jewish people.

Other Jews felt differently. The Pharisees believed that a return to the full keeping of the whole Torah would purify the Jewish people, for the kingdom of God would come by keeping the Torah, not by violence and force. The Sadducees, made up of established leaders among Jews, considered it essential to preserve the temple and traditional way of life, so they worked together with the Romans to maintain a degree of security and stability. The Essenes felt the majority of the Jews to be hopelessly impure and so withdrew to the shores of the Dead Sea to live a life of purity and await the coming of the messianic age. Many Jews felt a sense of expectancy, of a time soon when God would intervene to restore the sacred people and establish the kingdom of God. But the ideas about how that kingdom would be established differed from group to group.

In this setting, Jesus was born about 4 B.C.E. (the traditional dating is slightly incorrect) and grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, just a few miles from the city of Sepphoris where the Zealots revolted. He was born into a poor family, helped his father as a carpenter, became a wandering preacher and healer and teacher, claimed to present a new message about God and God's kingdom, presented a threat to the authorities, and was executed by crucifixion by the

Romans when he was about thirty-three years of age. His was a short, tragic life. But the Christian story sees it differently. Christians see in this short, tragic life the presence of the Messiah, the Son of God, the savior of the world.

The Jewish Scriptures as the "Old Testament" The Gospel of Matthew, standing first in the Christian collection of writings known as the New Testament, begins with a genealogy of Jesus: "A book of the descent of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Thus, the Christian story begins by firmly linking Jesus with the history of God's covenant people Israel. As Jews, the first Christians read and interpreted the Torah in much the same way as did their fellow Jews—with one crucial difference: Everything in the Torah and in the whole Hebrew scriptures was understood to point symbolically to Jesus as the Messiah.

According to the Christian story, then, God the loving parent created humans to live in fellowship and happiness with their creator. But humans fell into sin, rebelling against God and, thus, creating an estrangement from God that will continue for all generations. Because of this estrangement, humans live in evil and suffering and death, with eternal punishment the only prospect for the future. God, although a righteous judge, is also a loving parent. So God set about on a plan of salvation, a plan to overcome the sin and evil of humankind and reconcile them to God. For that purpose God called Abraham and his descendants, made a covenant with them, set up the Kingdom of David, and sent prophets to proclaim the divine word. In all of these events, people, and words, God was revealing the plan for the salvation of the world, promising Israel that one day this plan would be fulfilled in a complete and final way. The faithful people of Israel believed in God's promises, and it was counted to them as righteousness.

Since Christians see the story narrated in the Hebrew scriptures as the preliminary stage of God's plan of salvation, they speak of these scriptures as the **Old Testament.** These scriptures narrate the gradual unfolding of God's plan, foreshadowing and preparing for the culmination of this salvation through God's work in Jesus Christ. In this sense everything in the Old Testament points ahead to Christ: The high priest foreshadows Christ's priestly role; the king points to Christ's royal office as Son of God; the blood shed at the covenant ceremony prefigures the shedding of Christ's blood to establish a new covenant; and so forth.

The Christian story stresses the incomplete character of the Old Testament. It is understood to be open-ended, revealing the nature of God and the plan of salvation but ending before that salvation has been fully accomplished. In the Old Testament there are key prophecies, in which God reveals the divine intentions, given to encourage the faithful people to trust the promises and look to the future salvation. In particular, the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of the messianic age are important. For example, Isaiah 61:1–2 presents a vision of the messianic age, according to the Christian understanding:

> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
> because the Lord has anointed me;
> he has sent me to proclaim good news to the poor,
> to bind up the broken-hearted,
> to proclaim liberty to the captives
> and release to those who are bound;
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

According to the Christian story, Jesus read this passage at a synagogue meeting, and as he explained it he said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:16–21).

Therefore, as the gospel writers introduce Jesus and describe his life and death, they carefully link him to God's plan of salvation as it has been unfolded in the story of the Old Testament. The expectation of the Messiah is in the foreground, and the key question is that one asked by disciples of John the baptizer: "Are you the one who is coming, or do we look for another?" (Luke 7:20). The stories chosen and narrated about Jesus by the writers of the gospels answer that question with a clear, "Yes, this is the one!"

Life and Teachings of Jesus

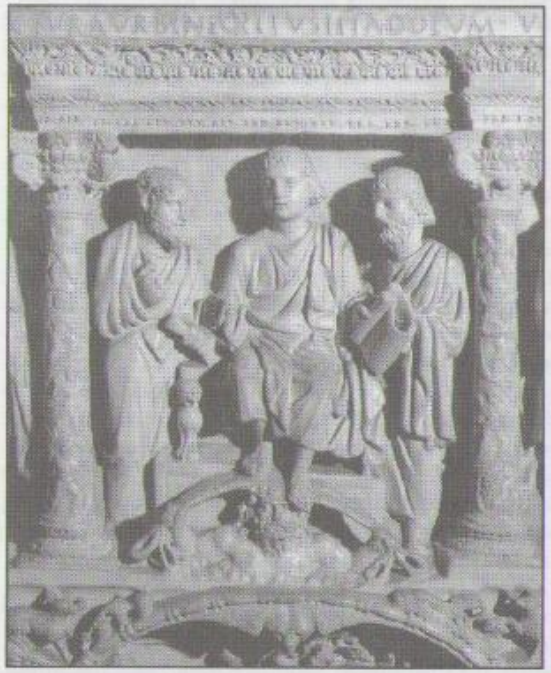
The focal point of Jesus' story is his death on the cross and his **resurrection,** understood by Christians as the climax and fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. To the story of his death and resurrection, however, are affixed stories of Jesus' birth and youth, his teachings about God, and the deeds by which he was witness to God's power of salvation. These stories point to the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the one in whom God's presence comes into the human world.

The Birth and Baptism of Jesus The birth of Jesus, as told in Matthew and Luke, came when God intervened once again in the course of human history to redeem the sacred people, as at the time of Moses. "The birth of Jesus Christ was in this way," wrote Matthew. "Mary his mother was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came together she was found with child by the Holy Spirit." When honorable Joseph was about to set aside the marriage, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. "She will bear a son, and you shall give him the name Jesus [savior], for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:18–25). According to the story as told by Luke, while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem to enroll in the census at their ancestral town, the baby Jesus was born, an event accompanied by hosts of angels singing the praises of God to shepherds in the fields. Wise men from the East came to offer gifts to the newborn king of the Jews. All these events symbolized the fulfilling of God's plan and prophecies of old.

When Jesus was a grown man, he began teaching and healing. The gospels first introduce John the baptizer, an ascetic Jew living in the wilderness and preaching repentance and **baptism** for the remission of sins. This is the man of whom the prophet Isaiah had written, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Mark 1:2). John pointed to Jesus as the one who was to come after him, the Lamb of God, and Jesus went out to be baptized by John in the river Jordan. Again God intervened with a sign: As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the Spirit descending like a dove on him; a voice spoke from heaven, "You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:9–11). Then Jesus, now knowing he was God's chosen one, went out to the wilderness to be tested for forty days, thus repeating in his own life the story of God's people Israel (who were tested forty years in the wilderness).

Preaching and Doing the Kingdom of God Attested by divine signs as the Messiah, the chosen one of God, Jesus began preaching in his home area of Galilee, proclaiming the "good news of God" and saying: "'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is come near! Repent, and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Jesus, in his preaching as presented in the gospels, told that the decisive age had now come for human history. The long period of preparation was over, the "time" was fulfilled. What was bursting upon the people was the long-awaited **kingdom of God**, when God would intervene in human history to bring about a new age of divine rule. And the proper response to this astounding revelation was to repent and believe the good news.

Shortly after Jesus began preaching the coming of the kingdom of God, he started to gather a community of disciples around himself. Walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two fishermen who were brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew. The story reports that Jesus said to them, "Come with me, and I will make you to be fishers of people." At once they left their nets and followed him (Mark 1:16–17). He called two more fishermen who were brothers, James and John; eventually twelve disciples gathered around him. Although the number twelve seems important to the story, symbolizing as it does the twelve tribes of Israel, many more people also followed Jesus as he went about Galilee as a wandering preacher and healer: "He went about the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and infirmity among the people. . . . And great



Christ sits between two apostles in this high-relief from the sarcophagus of a Roman prefect who died in 359 C.E.

crowds followed him" (Matthew 4:23–25). These disciples came from various social groups, although many appear to have been poor and uneducated. He associated with known sinners and tax collectors (whom many Jews condemned as collaborators with the Romans). And there were also women among his followers, including Mary Magdalen, thought to be a prostitute, and Mary and Martha of Bethany. The numbers of disciples and followers fluctuated, and many deserted him when times got bad. But here was the kernel of the new community, following Jesus as their master.

Jesus' work over the short period (traditionally thought to be three years) from the beginning of his preaching in Galilee to his trial in Jerusalem is rehearsed somewhat differently in each of the four gospels. But each describes a combination of teaching and deeds of helping and healing, all of which was to make the kingdom of God present among the people. Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God described it as a new order in which the love of God and the love of the neighbor would be the ruling motivation. In contrast to nationalistic expectations of a revival of the grand kingdom of David, Jesus taught about an inner kingdom, shared by all those who do God's will.

Much of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom took the form of **parables**, that is, short stories from everyday life that suggest the reality and the quality of the kingdom. He taught that the kingdom of God is like a wedding feast to which people are invited (Matthew 22:2–10). Or, again, the kingdom is like a mustard seed growing silently to become a large shrub (Mark 4:30–32). The kingdom is not political, nor is it just a future event. The kingdom is already at hand, working in a mysterious and quiet manner, having to do with the community of those who follow Jesus.

That the new era was breaking upon them was vividly demonstrated in Jesus' actions. At Capernaum, where Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a man possessed by an unclean spirit shrieked: "What do you have to do with us, O Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus exorcised the unclean spirit with a command, and all the people said, "What is this? A new kind of teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:21–28). The gospels recount many such incidents where Jesus performed deeds of healing, exorcism of evil spirits, multiplying food and wine, even raising the dead—as signs that the new age of God's kingdom had dawned.

A Radical New Way of Life Corresponding to the new age of the kingdom, Jesus taught a new way of life. As a practicing Jew himself, he emphasized two main tenets of the Jewish Torah: to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind; and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:35–40; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). However, he taught a more radical approach to loving God and one's neighbor than most of his fellow Jewish teachers did. In the homily called the Sermon on the Mount, he contrasted his teaching with the accepted tradition:

> You have heard that it was said to our forefathers, "You shall not kill; anyone who kills will be liable to judgment." But I say to you, anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be liable to judgment. . . . You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
>
> (Matthew 5:21–28)

Much of Jesus' teaching overturned the usual notions of behavior and God's rewards for it. Again from the Sermon on the Mount:

> Blessed are those of gentle spirit, for they shall inherit the earth.
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
> Blessed are those who show mercy, for mercy shall be shown to them.
> Blessed are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God.
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
> Blessed are those persecuted for the cause of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
>
> (Matthew 5:3–10)

So radical is the demand for a new kind of life in the new age that Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said [to your fathers], 'Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray on behalf of your persecutors. . . . You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43–48).

Throughout these teachings and deeds there is the ring of a strong sense of authority, of speaking for God, of sensing God's presence in a powerful way. In his prayers to God, Jesus (who spoke Aramaic, the common language of Palestine at this time) used the Aramaic term **Abba**, a familiar and endearing word for "father." It is true that many of

Jesus' sayings about his relationship with God are shot through with mystery and ambivalence. In the earliest gospel, that of Mark, Jesus is not reported to have claimed to be the Messiah or the Son of God—though others speak of him that way. But the gospel writers, telling the story at least a generation after the time of Jesus, certainly knew the belief of the earliest Christians that Jesus in fact was the Messiah. The Gospel of John, for example, has Jesus clearly revealing his identity as the Son of God through whom the Father is working. In any case, Jesus' actions and words were so radical and so full of the claim to God's authority that he was bound to come into conflict with the accepted Jewish interpretations.

Conflict over Authority The gospels and epistles of the New Testament—the new Christian scriptures—were written some years after Jesus' death, and they reflect to some extent the conflicts that developed later between the Jewish and Christian communities. But the Christian story pinpoints the heart of the conflict especially in Jesus' new interpretations of the Jewish Torah. On the one hand, he made the requirements much more stringent and radical. But, on the other hand, he acted as if he was above the Torah. For example, when he and his disciples walked along the road on a sabbath, they picked grain in the fields to prepare some food. When confronted by the Pharisees over this unnecessary breaking of the sabbath law, Jesus stated: "The sabbath was made for the sake of humans and not humans for the sake of the sabbath; therefore the son of man is master even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). He healed people on the sabbath. He forgave sins in his own name, leaving some lawyers to say, "Blasphemy! Who but God alone can forgive sin?" (Mark 2:7).

Possibly the biggest scandal Jesus caused resulted from his attitude toward sinners, toward those who consistently broke the Torah. He associated with such people and became known as a "friend of sinners." He sat at the table with them, extending the intimacy of table-fellowship to those who had put themselves outside the covenant people of God. And he taught that God forgives such people—in defiance of the traditional perception that God rewards those who do the divine will and punishes those who willingly break laws of the Torah and refuse to repent. Furthermore, he suggested that even the presumed righteousness of the religious teachers was no real righteousness at all. In words reminiscent of the prophets of old, Jesus castigated them: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For while you give tithes of mint and dill and cumin, you have neglected the more important demands of the Law, namely, justice, mercy, and faith. These you should do while not neglecting the others. O blind guides, you strain the gnat out, but you drink down the camel!" (Matthew 23:13–24). The parable of the wedding feast summed up this upside-down view of God and the covenant people. Those good people invited to the wedding, who found various excuses not to come, will find themselves shut out, while the bridegroom will send out to the highways and hedges to bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame (Luke 14:15–24).

What Jesus was teaching about the Torah and about God went beyond the covenant notion of the life of Torah as the highest good for humans and of God as a partner who rewards those who are faithful and punishes those who break the Torah. Jesus said that he came not to destroy the Torah but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), but he radicalized the demands of the Torah so that the most pious people in Israel fell far short of keeping the Torah in his eyes. And he taught that God is a friend to sinners, searching out the outcasts and rejected of the people. The whole notion of God as one who rewards and punishes based on covenant law was rejected in Jesus' teaching. Rather, God forgives and accepts sinners—even the woman caught in adultery, even the tax collector.

These teachings and acts of Jesus seemed to some to be arrogant and boastful—after all, Jesus was putting himself above the Torah; he was presuming to give radical new interpretations of the commandments. He claimed to be "master of the sabbath." Above all, he claimed to have a special close relationship with God as "Abba," which gave him authority to teach things about God that seemed to contradict the Torah given through Moses. In the traditional Jewish view, such rash words and deeds were "blasphemy," that is, dishonoring God and putting oneself in place of God.

Crucifixion and Resurrection

The historical facts of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution cannot be clearly and accurately reconstructed, for the Christian story is more interested in the theological meaning of this happening than in historical detail. Jesus

certainly did antagonize some of the leaders of his Jewish community, and it is possible they brought religious charges against him. But he also posed a political threat to the Roman occupational government; large groups of people acclaiming him as the Messiah, the "king of the Jews," could easily turn into a violent, nationalistic uprising. So it was the Roman government that arrested him, condemned him hastily to death, and executed him by crucifixion. It is true that there are elements of anti-Jewish feeling in the stories of Jesus' trial as recorded in the gospels—probably reflecting the sour relations between Christians and Jews in a later generation when the gospels were written. It is also true that in later centuries Christians sometimes rashly charged Jews with the death of Jesus. But Christians today have come to realize that such anti-Jewish elements are not an authentic part of the story of Jesus. He did no doubt have conflicts with some Jewish teachers and leaders. But, as the Apostles' Creed insists, he "was crucified under Pontius Pilate," the Roman governor.

The Meaning of Jesus' Death The Christian story really is not interested in the question of who killed Jesus. Much more important is the question of why Jesus died. The gospels present his death as having a meaning and purpose, indeed of happening in accordance with God's will and design. From early in his public career, Jesus began to predict he would have to follow God's plan and suffer and die at Jerusalem. The story says that, after Peter had just stated he believed Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, "he [Jesus] began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be put to death, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:27–32). Why did this have to happen? Jesus taught that "the son of man goes as it is written of him" (Matthew 26:24)—that is, in the scriptures God's plan had been revealed, and by Jesus' suffering and death this plan of salvation would be accomplished.

The disciples, of course, did not understand such talk, and Peter rebuked Jesus for saying this. Their idea of the **Messiah** was still that of a royal hero who would set up a great kingdom and place them at his right hand and his left in positions of power (Mark 10:37). Only after his death did his followers begin to understand that God's plan for the salvation of humankind involved taking all the sins and burdens of the world on Godself through the righteous servant. God's **plan of salvation** was to take the form of a suffering Messiah. They looked to the great prophetic passage from Isaiah 53 as the key to understanding why the son of man must be given up to suffer and die:

> He was despised and rejected by men,
> a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
> and as one from whom people hide their faces
> he was despised, and we had no esteem for him.
> Surely he himself has borne our griefs,
> and our sorrows he carried;
> yet we counted him stricken,
> smitten by God, and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our transgressions,
> tortured for our iniquities;
> the chastisement upon him made us whole,
> and by his stripes we are healed.
> All of us strayed like sheep,
> each of us turned to his own way.
> But the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all. . . .
> Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
> and with the mighty he will share the spoil,
> because he poured out his soul to death,
> and with the transgressors he was numbered.
> Yet he bore the sin of many,
> and for the transgressors he interceded.
>
> (Isaiah 55:3–6, 12)

Jesus' role as the Messiah was to follow the path of the suffering servant. Telling his disciples to be servants of one another, Jesus said, "For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Holy Week in Jerusalem Because of this conviction that he was carrying out God's plan, Jesus turned with his disciples from Galilee and made his way up to Jerusalem to confront the religious leaders there. The gospels concentrate on this **passion** (suffering) **story**, the events from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem until his death. He rode into Jerusalem as a king, seated on a donkey, with great crowds before and after singing the old chant of tribute to the king: "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). He confronted the authority of the religious leaders directly with his own charismatic authority. He went into the temple, the symbol of priest-

ly authority, and overturned the tables of those who exchanged money and sold pigeons for sacrifices; he healed blind men and cripples in the temple, refusing to answer the elders when they asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things?" (Matthew 21:23).

In Jerusalem, Jesus went to an upper room where he celebrated the Passover meal together with his community of disciples. Teaching them again about his coming death, Jesus used the wine and the bread of the Passover meal to symbolize his own body and blood, which would be sacrificed, as reported by Matthew:

> During supper Jesus took bread, and, saying the blessing, broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: "Take and eat; this is my body." Then, taking a cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them saying: "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."
>
> (Matthew 26:26–28)

The early Christians understood this act as the institution of the sacred meal of the Christians, the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Paul wrote that Jesus told them to "do this in remembrance of me," and then Paul added, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:23–26).

The gospel accounts tell the next part of the story in detail, leading to the fulfillment of Jesus' mission. After the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus was in agony, and he prayed, "My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). One of his disciples, Judas, had betrayed his whereabouts to those looking to arrest him; when he was seized, all his disciples deserted him and fled. He was first brought to the house of the high priest, where various charges were brought against him. Finally, the high priest put him under oath and demanded, "Tell us if you are the messiah, the son of God." Jesus answered, "You have said. But I tell you this: Hereafter you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of Power, coming on the clouds of heaven." At this, the high priest and council decided he was indeed guilty of blasphemy, and they handed him over to Pilate, the Roman governor (Matthew 26:59–66). In the meantime, Peter was denying he even knew Jesus, and Judas was in remorse for what he had done and hanged himself.

Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Painting by El Greco.

Jesus refused to answer Pilate's questions during the trial, and finally Pilate, washing his hands to signify his innocence in the matter, had Jesus flogged and handed him over to his soldiers to be crucified. Taking him to Golgotha, the hill of execution, they crucified him between two criminals. Suffering on the cross, Jesus asked forgiveness for his tormentors and, in his torment of suffering, cried out the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Finally,

with the words, "It is finished!," he died. The gospels tell how his death was accompanied with divine signs: three hours of darkness came first; then, when he died, the curtain partitioning off the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And the Roman centurion watching this all was moved to say, "Truly this was a son of God" (Mark 15:39).

The Christian story tells how Jesus' body was taken and buried in a tomb by a respected Jew, Joseph of Arimathaea, and how a guard was set so Jesus' followers would not steal the body. The next day was the sabbath, so early on the day after the sabbath several women who were followers of Jesus came to the tomb to anoint his body with oils—but they found the tomb was empty, and a youth sitting there in a white robe told them, "Do not fear! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here" (Mark 16:6).

Other disciples at first refused to believe this news, according to the gospel accounts; but Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to them a number of times—while several of them were walking on the road, and again while the eleven disciples were sitting at table. He had told them to meet him on a mountain in Galilee, and they made their way there. Before he finally left them, he gave them a **great commission** to go out into all the world and bring the good news of salvation to all. Luke reports that after Jesus had given them this commission, he was lifted up, and a cloud removed him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

Thus ends the story of the earthly Jesus—and begins the story of the risen Christ, Lord of the church, reigning at God's right hand and present in the world wherever his followers are. For this story of Jesus is a *sacred* story; in it Christians see revealed God's own son, the Messiah, the savior of the world. When Christians gather together they tell this story to one another as the Gospel, the Good News of God acting in Jesus Christ to bring salvation for all the world. Christians identify with this story, taking inspiration from it and modeling their lives on Jesus' own life.

Beginnings of the Christian Church

The four gospels are followed in the Christian scriptures by a writing called the Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke to continue the gospel story with the story of the risen Christ and the gathering of his followers into the "Christian church"—that is, the real founding of Christianity as a religion.

Pentecost and the Birth of the Church The story tells how the disciples were confused and afraid after Jesus' death and that only seeing the risen Christ kindled their courage. But before Jesus left them he told them to wait in Jerusalem to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. So on the Jewish festival of Shavuot (**Pentecost**) they were all together, when suddenly a great wind filled the house and tongues like flames of fire rested on each one. They were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other tongues so that Jewish pilgrims from various parts of the world could understand them, each in his own language. Peter, assuming a leadership role, stood up and preached the first Christian sermon, explaining that this happening was the promised pouring out of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28–32), which was to take place on the great day of the Lord. The new age had come! Peter explained how this Jesus, who was crucified, had been chosen by God; in God's plan he had been killed, but God raised him to life. "Let all the house of Israel then know for certain that God has made him both Lord and messiah, this Jesus you crucified!" When the people asked what they should now do, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1–39).

Those who accepted Peter's words were baptized (some three thousand that day, the story says), and the Christian **church** came into being. They continued to practice baptism, to meet together to hear the apostles teach, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to pray, and to share the common life. At first they sold their property and had everything in common. When disagreements arose concerning distribution of food to widows, the whole group selected seven deacons to handle the needs of food and clothing of the community, while the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of preaching the gospel. With that began the earliest forms of ministry in the church.

Persecutions and the Conversion of Paul The Christian sacred story tells of the trials of the early church in Jerusalem. Those following Christ still considered themselves Jews and attended the temple; but other Jews,

considering them to be an erring sect worshiping a false messiah, persecuted them, scattering many of them to the country districts of Judea and Samaria, where they continued to convert and baptize many. The first martyr was Stephen, one of the deacons, whose testimony to Jesus so enraged a crowd that they stoned him.

A witness to the stoning was a young Jew named Saul, who was born as a Roman citizen in Tarsus of Asia Minor but came to Jerusalem to learn better the Jewish way of life. Saul joined in the persecution of the Jewish Christians with great zeal until, on the road to Damascus, a light flashed from the sky and Saul heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" It was the risen Jesus, who gave Saul the mission to proclaim his name before nations and kings (Acts 9:1–16). Saul, now called **Paul**, became a great missionary for Christ, making trips throughout the Greek-speaking world—Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy—preaching the gospel of Christ and establishing Christian congregations wherever he went. Other apostles and leaders also went out in mission, to Samaria, Syria, Ethiopia, Arabia, and other places, and many people believed in the gospel about Jesus Christ and were baptized. Christians were carrying out the commission given by Jesus: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In this Christian story of the people of God gathered around Jesus Christ, two developments were particularly crucial on the way to the universal Christian church. One arose from the tension within the early Christian community between the Jewish heritage and the mission to bring the gospel to all the world. The other development arose from the need to translate the Jewish Christian gospel into language and concepts understandable to people in the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) world of the Roman Empire. Both of these developments involved a great deal of thinking and struggling with the meaning of faith in Jesus as the Christ. This was the beginning of *theologizing*, that is, creating Christian doctrines of faith to guide people and preserve the good news about Jesus. These developments arose out of specific situations in the different Christian communities. It was in response to such situations that the gospels and the letters that make up the New Testament were written. Paul, whose letters responding to problems in different congregations are the earliest writings in the New Testament, had a particularly profound influence on the development of Christian **theology**. The Johannine writings (the Gospel of John and the Letters of John), traditionally attributed to Jesus' disciple but of uncertain authorship, have also had a deep impact on theological perspectives.

Jews and Gentiles in the Christian Church After Paul's conversion, he returned to Tarsus, and then with his colleague Barnabas he set up work in Antioch. He felt himself called especially to bring the gospel to the gentiles (non-Jews), so with Antioch as a base he launched out into the Greek world. At first he regularly went to the Jewish synagogues to proclaim to the Jewish communities, scattered throughout the Roman world, that the fulfillment of their hopes was in Jesus as the Messiah. Usually he had limited success among the Jewish people, so more and more he began to take the message about Christ to the non-Jewish population. Thus, there arose many Christian congregations that were made up of both Jewish and gentile Christians. And the question arose: Should the non-Jewish Christians be compelled to follow the rules of the Torah, such as circumcision and the dietary laws? Some Jewish Christians were insisting that they must, since these were laws given by God; others apparently advocated separating into two churches, one comprised of Torah-observing Christians and the other of gentiles who did not observe the laws of the Torah.

The basic question was discussed in a meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem. They decided to impose no "irksome burdens" on the gentile Christians, except for these essentials: to abstain from meat offered to idols, from blood, from anything strangled, and from fornication (Acts 15:6–29). It was their view, thus, that it is not necessary for Christians to observe all the Torah of Moses. The problem kept arising, however. In Galatia, some Jewish Christians tried to insist that the gentiles must be circumcised and obey the dietary laws in addition to faith in Christ, and Paul responded with the Letter to the Galatians in which he wrote what became the classic defense of Christian liberty. He insisted that a person is made right with God only by trust in the promise about Christ, not by any works or ritual observances. Here he articulated the central Christian doctrine of salvation simply by faith, and he further showed how this would lead Christians to live their lives freely motivated by the promptings of the Spirit of God. And in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul showed how there can be but one Christian church. Although Christians come from various races and nationalities, they are one because they are

FURTHER TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN WAY

At the close of the New Testament period, around the end of the first century C.E., the church had been established in many parts of the Roman world. But there were many challenges that it faced over the next several centuries, as Christians created a church that transcended the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The medieval synthesis of culture produced Christendom, but that was shaken and torn apart in the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Much of the modern history of Christianity has been tied up with the rise of science and industrialization, introducing problems that the Christian churches are still trying to meet. Christian identity today has been shaped by all these historical transformations.

The Early Christian Church in the Roman World

Because Christians had been closely tied to Judaism, severing that relationship was a painful process. Furthermore, leaving the security of being a Jewish sect that was permitted by the Roman authorities, the Christian church found itself an illicit religion in the Roman Empire, and at times its members suffered persecution and had to practice their religion secretly and underground. This "church of the catacombs" continued to grow, however, and the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.

The Challenge of Gnosticism Continuing challenges to faith and doctrine came in the form of Hellenistic cults and philosophies. Gnosticism especially proved to be a persistent influence in shaping beliefs of the Christians, providing as it did an answer to the question of evil and how one can be freed from it. The world of matter is evil and unreal, but humans are essentially spiritual, Gnosticism taught; salvation means escape from this worldly prison. These ideas led to new pictures of Jesus as the great Spirit descended from the world of light, spreading his secret teaching to liberate the souls of his followers from the prison of this material world.

A leading Christian thinker with Gnostic tendencies was Marcion (died ca. 160). He taught that love is the central element in Christianity, and that Christ's salvation is of the spirit, not the body. Since the Old Testament is based on law and justice, Marcion concluded that the God of the Old Testament was an evil creator who had made physical sex the means of reproduction. Marcion rejected the Old Testament completely, and he carefully edited Christian writings to exclude anything contrary to his Gnostic ideas. He rejected marriage, wine, and anything to do with the body. Only celibates could be baptized.

Many Christian thinkers entered the lists to defend Christian faith against Gnosticism and Marcionism. For example, Irenaeus (ca. 130–202) defended the authority of the Old Testament, arguing that God created all matter and form. Humans are created in the image of God, even though they have become bogged down in sin. Christ, eternal with the Father, truly became man, exhibiting what humans should be in growing to their full stature; the divine entered this life to show us how to recover the image of God.

Canon, Creed, Clergy In order to resolve the questions raised by Gnostics and others, the early church needed to do several things: declare what its authentic scriptures were, formulate its beliefs clearly, and establish the continuity of a recognized leadership. The result was the **canon** (accepted sacred writings) of the New Testament, the **Apostles' Creed**, and the structure of clergy leadership.

Between the second and fourth centuries, Christian leaders came to agreement on which sacred writings should make up the Christian scriptures of the New Testament. Copies of various gospels and letters of the apostles had been circulating in the churches, but now an effort was made to determine which ones should be considered authoritative for all Christians. The major test was that they should have been authored by an apostle. Furthermore, the content should correspond to the faith that was handed down by the apostles. By these tests, eventually the Gnostic and other questionable writings were excluded, and the New Testament was narrowed down to the generally accepted canon of twenty-seven writings.

The Apostles' Creed was the earliest confession of faith that widely circulated in the early church, having been composed around the year 150. It emphasized doctrines especially against Gnostic ideas, asserting the creation of the world by God, Christ as true man who suffered and died, the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment.

To combat the misguided teachings and maintain unity and order, the early church devised a structure for ecclesiastical leadership in the form of ordained **clergy**. Paul had already adopted the practice of appointing bishops (overseers) to guide the congregations of Christians that he founded. Now the office of bishop became the church's bulwark of unity and defense against heresy. To assist the bishop in leading communities of Christians, presbyters (elders) and deacons were also ordained, the presbyter to preside over worship and the deacon to minister to the people's needs.

Philosophy and Theology As more and more educated people of the Roman world converted to the Christian way, the fertile challenge of Greek philosophy became more pressing. Up to now, Christian thinkers had responded to challenges on an ad hoc basis, with letters, specific defenses (apologies), sermons, and manuals of ethics. But the serious confrontation with philosophical worldviews called for more comprehensive theological systems. The big question increasingly raised itself: How does Christian belief about the world stand up to the systematic understanding of the philosophers and scientists of the Graeco-Roman tradition?

Some Christian thinkers, trained in philosophy but now convinced of the truth of Christianity, answered this by arguing the truth of scripture and the apostolic tradition against the uncertainties of human reason. Tertullian (ca. 145–220), for example, argued that God's revelation was found in the scriptures and apostolic testimony, not in philosophical speculation: "What has Christ to do with Plato, Jerusalem with Athens?" Still, Tertullian began to devise a theological system explaining the Triune God—the Trinity—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

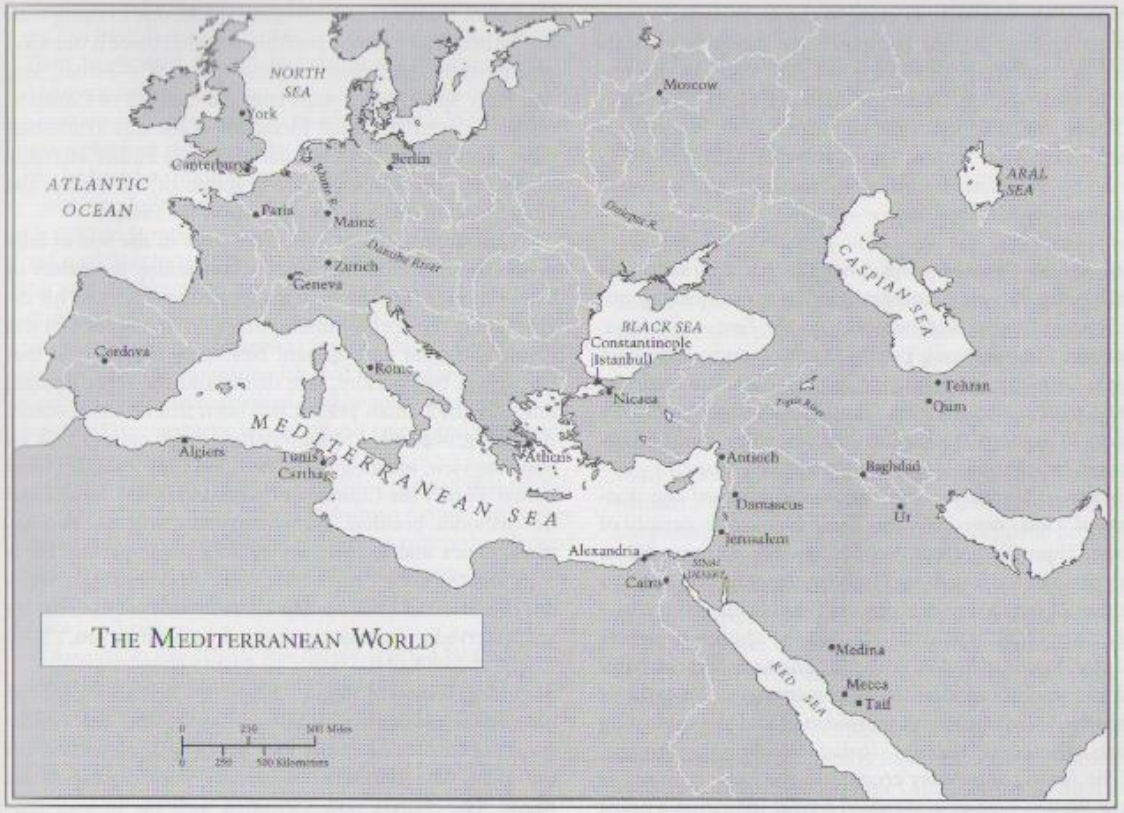
Others, like Justin Martyr (ca. 100–166) and Clement of Alexandria (150–215), saw Greek philosophy as an authentic expression of God's truth. Justin felt that the same Logos ("Word," John 1:1) that had inspired the prophets of the Old Testament and became manifest in Christ had also inspired the Greek philosophers. He did hold, however, that the truth of philosophy is incomplete apart from its completion in Christ. Clement also held that all truth comes from the universal Logos and, thus, philosophical speculation and prophetic revelation are compatible. Clement even suggested that theologians could look to the thinkers of ancient Persia, India, and other places to find truth that comes from the eternal Logos and that is fully expressed in the Christian scriptures and in Christ.

Emperor Constantine and Imperial Christianity Christians steadily increased in the Roman Empire. But as members of an illicit religion, they continued to suffer periodic persecutions. The last persecution was the most vicious—that under Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305). But in 312 one of his generals, **Constantine**, was victorious over the other generals in gaining control of Rome, and a new day began. Perhaps seeing the trends, Constantine began to side with the Christians (although he himself was not baptized as a Christian until he was on his deathbed). In 313, the Edict of Milan granted toleration to Christianity, and Constantine did much to strengthen and unify the church. Although anti-Christian policies were briefly revived under Emperor Julian (the Apostate, r. 361–363), by 380, Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the *only* religion allowed in the Roman Empire.

Now the situation of the Christian church changed—it was established, an integral part of Roman culture, joined with the political structures of the Roman Empire. Its destiny was for the time at least intertwined with Rome. Christianity clearly had become a world religion.

With the growth of the church in the Roman Empire, church structures gradually became consolidated as bishops of important regions took on dominant leadership roles. From early times, the role of the bishop of Rome was especially respected because of the traditional links that Peter and Paul had with the church in Rome. By the fourth and fifth centuries, the bishops or "popes" of Rome were asserting primacy over the whole church. The primacy of the papacy—that is, the pope of Rome looked to as the leader of the whole church—was resisted in the eastern regions of the church, for the bishop of Constantinople was considered an equal office. But, at least throughout the western regions of the church, the institution of the papacy came to dominate church leadership for many centuries.

Counterculture: Monasticism Judaism had placed little importance on asceticism, that is, withdrawal from the social and sensuous aspects of life. But from early on groups of Christians devoted themselves to fasting, prayer, contemplation, and a life of poverty. Many followed Paul in considering virginity and celibacy to be superior to



THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

marriage, and martyrdom was seen as the supreme way to heaven.

As the Christian church moved into partnership with the political structure and culture of the Roman state, the monastic movement created a kind of counterculture of withdrawal. And, although **monasticism** began as a rigorous discipline practiced in isolation, later the monasteries became important socializing forces in the development of Christendom, as most church leaders underwent training and discipline in the monasteries.

Already in the third century there appeared the two basic types of monasticism. The eremitical (hermit) monk was an individual seeking salvation in isolation, and the cenobitic (communal) monks practiced their disciplines in small communities. In the fourth and fifth centuries, thousands of Christians withdrew from society and took to monasticism. Some went to extremes, doing things like living in caves or tombs, fasting frequently, not bathing, waking every three minutes to praise God, avoiding contact with the opposite sex, and generally outdoing each other in the extremes of physical deprivation. One well-known but extreme eremitic monk was Simeon Stylites (d. ca. 454), who sat for thirty-six years on top of a 60-foot pillar!

Two important leaders of monasticism were Basil of Caesarea (ca. 330–379) and Jerome (ca. 347–420). Basil created a rule that provided structure for the monastic community within the larger church order. He set forth an ideal of perfect service to God and communal obedience, emphasizing poverty, chastity, prayer, study, and labor. Basil's Rule formed the basis of monasticism in the eastern

section of the Christian church. In the western part of the Roman Empire, Jerome combined his scholarly pursuits (such as translating the Bible into Latin) with the promotion of monasticism. Under his influence even rich women of Rome joined monasteries or turned their homes into monasteries. One widow, Paula, traveled with Jerome to Syria and Palestine, founding monasteries and convents and a hospice for travelers.

Theological Controversies and Church Councils As Christianity became a world religion, it spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond it to the East—to Edessa, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Arabia, even to India and China. Growing and maturing in these different environments, with challenges from Gnosticism, philosophy, and a variety of Eastern spiritual influences, some basic differences of belief and thought arose within the church.

Many of the major controversies concerned the doctrine of God, especially the Trinity and the person of Christ. These Trinitarian and Christological controversies took place in the fourth and fifth centuries, giving rise to a number of important ecumenical (worldwide) councils—gatherings of bishops from all over the church to debate and decide on orthodox doctrine. Through these debates and the resolutions decided by the councils, the **catholic** (universal) Christian faith was defined and the dissenting beliefs rejected as "heresies" (beliefs dividing the church).

The Arian controversy erupted in the Eastern churches of the Roman Empire and caused a great rift. Arius, a priest from Egypt, put forth the view that the Son was created by the Father in time. This created Logos took the form of the earthly Jesus to bring saving knowledge. Thus, "there was when he was not," and only the Father is truly eternal God. This Arian view (**Arianism**) was widely accepted, for it was based on biblical statements, and it seemed to solve the problem of the Trinity appearing to be three Gods. Here appeared to be a simple, strong monotheism.

But Bishop Athanasius (ca. 296–373) and other Christian thinkers recognized a danger to the Christian faith in this popular Arian view. To worship Christ as a being created in time would be to worship a divine being other than the one God! Emperor Constantine, anxious to settle this dispute and unify his realm, convened an ecumenical council at Nicea in Asia Minor in 325. The **Council of Nicea** solved the problem by deciding that the Son is "true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father." The catholic position was that there is one God who nevertheless consists of three "persons"—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some years later the Council of Constantinople arrived at a final formulation for this Trinitarian view: The Trinity is an eternal unity, the Father eternally ingenerate, the Son eternally begotten of the Father, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father.

While these councils settled the issue of the Son as fully divine, another controversy arose concerning the nature of Christ himself: Did he have a split personality? Did his divine nature replace his human nature? What part of him was divine and what part human? Nestorius of Syria held that Christ was two persons, one divine and the other human; but only the human person was born from Mary's womb. Another group called Monophysites (single nature) took an opposite view, insisting that Christ has only a single divine nature. Finally the Council of Chalcedon in 451 formulated the orthodox position: The incarnated Christ has two natures, divine and human, united in a single person. He is "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord," in two natures, without confusion or division. The characteristics of each nature are preserved and come together to form one person.[1]

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo Emperor Constantine moved his capital eastward to Constantinople, and the Greek-speaking Christians of the East began drifting away from the West. The northern barbarians were closing in on Rome. The church, now identified with the Roman Empire, was wracked with new controversies in place of those that had been settled. For example, Manicheism, a mixture of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism, presented a strong rival to Christianity. It taught a dualism of light and darkness and advocated a severe asceticism to liberate the divine particles of light. Within the Christian church, Pelagius was teaching that every person is free, as Adam was, to sin or not to sin; thus, there was not a universal need for Christ's work of redemption.

In these intercrossings of history and controversy, **Augustine** (354–430) stood forth as one of the greatest theologians of the early church. In his *Confessions* (an autobiographical masterpiece of Latin literature), Augustine says the soul is restless until it finds rest in God. He did much searching before he found his resting point. He lived with a mistress for fifteen years, had a son, and searched for the truth in

Manicheism for many years. He reports his own prayer during this time: "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet." Then he studied Neo-Platonism, heard the preaching of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and found his way back to the Christian faith (the religion of his mother). While he still was struggling with his attachments to his sensual way of life, he heard a child's voice from over a garden wall crying, "Tolle lege, tolle lege" (Take up and read, take up and read). He opened at random a copy of Paul's Letter to the Romans and read: "Let us walk becomingly, as in daytime, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in strife and rivalry. Rather, arm yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and give no thought to the flesh for its desires" (Romans 13:13–14). Augustine felt that this was an oracle from God; his doubts were resolved, and he soon was baptized. He practiced the monastic life, became a priest, and finally was made bishop of Hippo in north Africa.

Arguing against Pelagius, Augustine insisted that the fall into sin caused a basic change in human nature. Sin lodges in the will, consisting of the attempt to usurp the place of God. We are not able not to sin and, hence, we cannot help toward our salvation but must depend entirely on God's grace in Christ.

Augustine, like others, was deeply affected by the sack of Rome by Alaric and the pagan Goths in 410—eternal Rome had fallen! To show that this was not the fault of Christianity, Augustine wrote his monumental *City of God*, finishing it just four years before his death, when his city of Hippo was under siege by the Vandals. Augustine argued that there are two cities, the earthly city and the heavenly city. Those who belong to the city of God are the elect, although they are compelled to live in the earthly city. Because humans have fallen, God has provided governmental institutions to regulate sinful society. The two cities intermingle throughout history—but in the church, the city of God has begun its fulfillment. Since the earthly city does give relative peace and order, Augustine argued Christians should participate and seek at least to mitigate violence and injustice in the world.

Medieval Christianity: The Age of Faith

With the invasions of the barbarians of northern Europe and the decline of the Roman Empire, the Christian church faced an uncertain future. Having finally Christianized the Roman Empire and become established as its state religion, Christians now faced hordes of non-Christian invaders and the threat of being swept away with the Roman Empire. The challenge was met; the invaders were Christianized and carried the new religion to new regions north and east. The period of Christendom was ushered in, to last for the next thousand years until the Renaissance.

Christendom Germanic tribes repeatedly invaded the western part of the Roman Empire. But as the nature of the empire changed under their influence, they gradually adopted the culture and religion of the people they were conquering. A particularly significant event took place near the Rhine River in 496. Clovis, king of the Franks, was a worshiper of tribal gods; but, under the influence of his Christian wife, Clovis appealed to Christ in a battle against another Germanic tribe. Clovis won the battle, and afterward he and many of the Franks were baptized. Clovis remained a cruel tribal chieftain, and the Christianization of the morals and societal values of the Germanic peoples was a long process. But the result was a new construction: Christendom, arising from the fusion of the religion of the Roman Empire with the culture of the northern barbarians.

As the power of the Roman political state declined, the church in the West especially cultivated the monastic life. Benedict (ca. 480–550) became the fountainhead of Western monasticism by establishing a Rule at Monte Cassino, which became the pattern followed widely. Promoting a moderate asceticism, the Rule called for the communal life to revolve around the Divine Office of prayer at fixed times throughout the day. Prayer was to be balanced by work and study, and these monasteries following Benedict's Rule became major centers of social work, evangelism, and scholarship during the Middle Ages.

Some of the monastic orders were especially devoted to missionary work among the barbarians. The old Celtic Christian church in Britain fell into disarray with the incursion of the Anglo-Saxons. But the Benedictine monk Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604) was sent as missionary to these pagan invaders and initiated a new era of Christian growth in England. Augustine followed a principle of accommodation as he evangelized the Anglo-Saxons: Shrines and holy days dedicated to the pagan gods could be taken over and Christianized, thus making the conversion of the pagans less traumatic and more enriching for Christianity.

Before long, the monasteries of England were sending missionaries to Germany.

As the Germanic peoples were taken into the Christian fold, they often in turn became strong missionaries to other Germanic tribes. Frequently such "evangelizing" turned more to force than to persuasion, as in the Christian conquest of the north German Saxons or the exploits of King Olaf in Christianizing Norway. The great Charlemagne (ca. 742–814) led the way in converting the north German Saxons, as he established an empire stretching from northern Spain to Bavaria. Pope Leo III crowned him Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day, 800. The result was the creation of a more stable, unified Christendom including also the northern Germanic tribes.

In the East, two brothers, Cyril (826–869) and Methodius (ca. 815–885), were sent out as missionaries to the Slavs of Moravia. The conversion of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the tenth century led to the "baptism of Russia," and the Eastern **Orthodox Church** flourished there. After the fall of Constantinople to the Turkish Muslims, Moscow became the center of Eastern Orthodoxy and was considered the "Third Rome" of Christianity.

When the pope crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor, the idea was born of a unified Christendom with even the secular rulers under the authority of the pope. The church was a part of Europe's feudal structure, with church officials serving as vassals of great nobles. Often the rulers and the popes came into conflict, especially when the German emperors interfered in church affairs. After a confrontation, Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073–1085) excommunicated Emperor Henry IV. Relenting, Henry stood barefoot in the snow for three days outside the castle of Canossa, in submission to the authority of the pope. But three years later, balking at a second excommunication, Henry marched on Rome and deposed Gregory. Thereafter a compromise of sorts was reached between the cross and the crown, as spelled out in the Concordat of Worms (1122). Secular rulers were to recognize the local bishops' loyalty to the pope, and the pope was supposed to appoint bishops acceptable to the emperor.

Eastern Orthodoxy: Split with the West During the period of the early church councils, much of the theological leadership of the church had been in the eastern Greek-speaking regions. The theology and liturgy of the Eastern church continued to cultivate accents different from the Western Latin churches. The Western church, following Augustine, emphasized the utter sinfulness of human nature and Jesus' death as the key to God's redeeming activity. But the tendency in the East was to focus on the restoration of God's image in humans through the incarnation of Christ. Christ united the Godhead to human nature; by sharing in Christ's perfect humanity, humans could be raised up to God. The Eastern church kept a "high" Christology, in which the divine nature of Christ was the focus, for this is what, in union with humankind, makes it possible for humans to rise to God.

Eastern Christianity was also developing the sacred liturgy as a solemn celebration recapitulating the whole drama of salvation, unifying worshipers on earth and in heaven. The solemn ritual, beautiful chanting, rich vestments, and colorful icons combined to provide a powerful expression of the Christian faith in ritual. The liturgy spread over into mystical practices in the monasteries, where cultivation of interior contemplation focused on illumination of the soul with the divine Light.

The invasions of the barbarians effectively cut the Eastern church off from the Western, and gradually they lost touch with each other. Often Rome and Constantinople found themselves in political conflict, and ecclesiastical rivalry also became more bitter, as the Roman popes pressed their claims to papal authority. The Eastern bishops were willing to recognize the Roman bishop as *primus unter pares* (first among equals) because of the tradition of Paul and Peter at Rome, but they refused to accept the universal jurisdiction claimed by the Roman popes.

A symbolic crowning touch to the East–West split was the little Latin word *filioque* ("and the son"). Already in the sixth century, some Western churches began adding to the Nicene Creed the phrase that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father "and the Son." Eastern theologians feared that this clause would impair the unity of the Trinity, for they saw the Father as the foundational source of the Trinity, with the Son eternally begotten of Him and the Spirit eternally proceeding from Him. The squabble was symptomatic of deeper rifts, and neither side would give in. An Eastern council condemned the Roman pope for heresy because of the filioque clause. Finally, in 1054, the pope in turn excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, putting the finishing touch on a schism that had been developing over several centuries.

Islamic Pressure and the Crusades Medieval Christendom gradually absorbed and Christianized such foreign invaders as the Vikings from Scandinavia and the Magyars (the later Hungarians) from Asia. But the eruption of Islam into the Christian world was a different story. Five years after the Prophet Muhammad's death, Jerusalem fell (637) to 'Umar, the second caliph. The new religious wave devastated Christian Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, as Muslim armies overthrew the Byzantine overlords and the peasant population happily accepted the new religion of equality and justice. The Muslim tide advanced into Spain and even across the Pyrenees into France, stopped finally by Charles Martel at Poitiers (732). Later, across Asia Minor (Turkey) the Muslims went, and finally in 1453 Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks, putting an end to the Byzantine Empire.

Since the Muslims recognized Christians and Jews as monotheists, "people of the Book," they were not forced to become Muslim, although many did. Christian communities continued to live and thrive in Muslim lands, paying a special tribute tax to the rulers in return for security and autonomy. Christian pilgrims were still permitted to visit the holy places of Jerusalem. But when the more intolerant Seljuk Turks gained control of Jerusalem in the latter part of the eleventh century, Europeans feared they would suppress pilgrimage and destroy the Christian shrines. The Byzantine emperor was also under pressure from the Turks, and in 1095 he appealed to Pope Urban II for assistance.

Urban II preached a remarkable sermon at the Council of Clermont in France (1095). He described the desecration of Jerusalem, portrayed Christ himself as leading any army that went to the rescue, and promised cancellation of debts, exemption from taxes, possession of new lands, and a reward of eternal life to any who joined the holy war against the Muslims. Crying "Deus vult!" (God wills it!), knights from Germany, France, and Italy set out for the Holy Land. Many claimed new land for themselves and settled along the way, but in 1099, a small band reached Jerusalem. On Good Friday they breached the walls and instigated a great massacre, unmoved by the tears of women and children. Their victims included Christians who happened to look like their Muslim neighbors.

Despite the "success" of the first Christian crusade, the Muslims continued to fight back, and a series of crusades followed. The second crusade was promoted especially by the saintly, peace-loving man of God, Bernard of Clairvaux—but it failed miserably because of quarrels among the leaders. The third crusade also failed, and the fourth crusade (1201–1204) went out of control and attacked Christian Constantinople. There were other crusades, like the Children's Crusade of 1212 led by a shepherd boy, whose most tangible result was a host of slave boys for Mediterranean ship captains. The spiritual energy that had promoted this crusading effort cooled, and what was left was desire for booty and control of trade routes. Three new orders of knighthood to protect the Holy Land emerged: the Hospitalers, the Templars, and the Order of Teutonic Knights. But the Holy Land was not won, Islam was not driven back, and the church was not purified.

Reformers, Scholastics, and Mystics Even before the crusades there was a growing desire for reform of the church and especially its monasteries and clerics, many of whom had become infected with worldly concerns. Two new monastic orders in particular brought new life to the church in the Middle Ages. Dominic (1170–1221) realized that to win the masses it was necessary to live simply and preach the Word clearly. In 1214, he founded the Dominican Order, dedicated exclusively to preaching and scholarship. They lived by begging and were called the Black Friars because of their simple black habit. One rule was that no one could preach without three years of theological training. The Dominicans established themselves in the fast-growing universities and produced one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the times, Thomas Aquinas, and also the great mystic Meister Eckhart.

Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) revolted against his own youthful indulgence in riches and sensuality to devote his life to the ideal of poverty. He begged for his livelihood, working only to serve, storing nothing and owning nothing. He wandered about preaching and tending lepers, and even made a trip to Egypt to preach to the Muslims. His followers were organized into the Franciscan Order.

The pressure for learning was mounting. Between 1200 and 1250, many new universities were started in Europe, with professors and students coming from all over western Europe, communicating in the Latin of the day. Scholars began to rediscover Greek philosophical thought, especially through the commentaries of Muslim scholars like Avicenna and Averoes. In the thirteenth century, Christian scholasticism thrived especially through the work of Thomas Aquinas (1225/7–1274).

Aquinas, who taught at the universities of Paris and Naples, used a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle to create a systematized theology that has remained widely influential down to the twentieth century. He held that philosophy examines the natural order by means of reason, whereas theology examines the supernatural by means of revelation. Philosophy cannot contradict theology because both are forms of truth. Yet theology, based on God's revelation, opens up the higher levels of knowledge. Theology perfects philosophy, taking it to realms it cannot penetrate on its own. Aquinas felt that humans can discover the existence of God through observation and reflection. Philosophy is available to all, even Jews and Muslims, and so it provides a universal basis for reflection and discussion.

Thomas's magnum opus, written during the last two years of his life, is the *Summa Theologica* (left incomplete), a massive, systematized statement of the Christian faith. His original and profound theological teachings received special endorsement in later ages by the Roman Catholic church, and his work has been a continuing mainstay in Catholic theology for many centuries. He is highly revered as a doctor of the church. Today many theologians still make use of the Thomistic theological system in dealing with questions of the modern age.

An important movement, which was at one and the same time an expression of medieval spirituality and an alternative to the intermediary function of the church, was mysticism. The mystics sought direct contact with God rather than relying only on ecclesiastical machinery, sacraments, and satisfactions.

A leading mystic in Germany was Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1327), who chose to talk of God in essentially negative terms. Thinking in Neo-Platonic concepts, he felt God to be beyond being and nonbeing but also present as the divine spark in the world and in the soul. The mystical goal is complete union of the divine spark in us with God, which is the loss of individuality and immersion in God's reality. It is through negating the empirical self, leading a life of poverty and stillness and contemplation, that creatureliness can be transcended in union with God.

Eckhart's disciple Johann Tauler (ca. 1300–1361) emphasized the life of sacrifice and charity that the mystical experience of God promotes. When the plague of the Black Death struck (1348), Tauler expended himself ministering to the sick and dying. Eckhart and Tauler inspired thousands of clergy and laypeople to practice this kind of simple mysticism, dedicated to the inner life of contemplation and piety. Another mystically inclined movement that emphasized practical love and included both clergy and laity was the Brethren of the Common Life. They lived in houses with a rule like monks but did not take permanent vows. Practicing the "new devotion" of a simple, undogmatic faith, they established schools and gave free instruction. One of them, Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380–1471), produced Christianity's most widely used devotional book, *The Imitation of Christ*.

Thus, mysticism moved beyond ecclesiastical structures and caught the imagination of common people who desired intense religious experience within their ordinary vocations. It appealed also to women, such as Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), who spoke of her mystic experience as a "spiritual marriage with God" and devoted herself to helping victims of the Black Death. Two centuries later, another woman mystic, Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), became very influential. St. Teresa balanced her mystical experiences with periods of intense activity in reforming her own monastic order, the Carmelites, calling it back to its original ideal of poverty. Struggling against antagonism and harassment from opponents, St. Teresa was guided by her visions and inner knowing, producing very influential spiritual writings describing her mystical marriage to Christ. In her best known writing, *The Interior Castle*, she uses the image of a transparent crystal castle complete with seven mansions to describe the seven levels of prayer and the experience of the soul. The innermost mansion is Jesus Christ, and the closer one moves to this inner mansion the stronger the light of union with Christ becomes.

Renaissance and Reformation

The need for continual reformation and renewal is felt in most world religions. As an established part of culture and society, religion can easily become fossilized or used for nonspiritual ends. From time to time movements of renewal arise, calling the religion back to the original experience and purpose.

Renewal and Renaissance In the later Middle Ages, as the feudal structure of society was weakening and the grand system of the medieval church was starting to

unravel, new voices for reform began to be heard, leading to the Protestant Reformation and drastic changes in church and society. An English scholar, John Wycliffe (ca. 1329–1384), promoted translating the Bible into English and became a critic of many aspects of the medieval church, including the papacy. The availability of the Bible in the vernacular proved to be a revolutionary force. In Czechoslovakia, John Hus, rector of the University of Prague (ca. 1373–1415), led a religious rebellion, appealing to scripture to attack abuses of the church that were out of line with the injunctions of the New Testament—and was burned at the stake in Constance as a heretic. The influence of Wycliffe, Hus, and other reformers reverberated across Europe, setting the stage for more widespread reformation and transformation of society.

Some of these reforming movements were influenced by the larger movement of cultural and social change known as the Renaissance, which contained the seeds of many aspects of modernity: individualism, secularism, rationalism, nationalism, urbanization, and industrialization. Interest in the culture of ancient Greece and Rome increased, and Christian scholars learned the biblical languages. The spread of printing presses made for the rapid dissemination of the new learning. The Renaissance scholars dedicated themselves to a humanistic philosophy not necessarily centered on religious concerns, sometimes even questioning the basis of religious beliefs and practices. Christian humanists, like Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) and Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466–1536), attempted to reconcile the new learning with traditional Christian faith. But the popes of the Renaissance were not up to the challenge of the times, giving themselves to corruption or consolidating their political power.

An engraving depicting Martin Luther, leader of the Reformation.

Martin Luther and the Reformation The spark that ignited the **Reformation** was an ironic piece of the Renaissance. In the wave of enthusiasm for the new classicism in architecture, Pope Julius II developed some ambitious plans for a new and magnificent St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and laid the first stone in 1506. The project dragged on at enormous cost, and Pope Leo X (1475–1521) began to raise money through the traditional practice of selling indulgences. The church had long claimed the right to grant indulgences—that is, remission of punishment in purgatory due for sins—drawing on the great store of merit gained by Christ and the saints. Although it was the question of indulgences that first sparked Luther's protest, actually the whole medieval synthesis of Christendom was being called into question.

Martin Luther (1483–1546), of peasant stock, went to the University of Erfurt to get a law degree. A crisis in his life led him to join the Augustinian Order and study theology, after which he was assigned to teach at the new university of Wittenberg in Saxony. In 1510, his order sent him to Rome, but his experience of the ignorance and corruption of the Holy City left him with doubt and despair. He wrestled with his own sense of unworthiness and inability to find relief through the monastic practices. But a momentous experience changed his life: his so-called tower experience. Preparing for lectures on the Psalms, he was bothered

by the references to God's righteousness. Turning to Romans 3:21–24, he read:

> Now God's righteousness is revealed apart from the law, testified to by the Law and the Prophets, God's righteousness which is through faith in Jesus Christ unto all who believe. For there is no difference; all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Raging at God over the impossibility of living up to the righteousness of God, Luther suddenly saw a totally different meaning: The righteousness of God is a *forgiving* righteousness, by which God makes us righteous through Christ. This theology of "justification through faith by grace" henceforth became the heart of Luther's theology, leading him ultimately to reject all ideas of justification through one's own monastic practices or through the works of the church: penance, the sacraments, absolution, and the like.

Confronted by the sale of indulgences—which many German priests and rulers found objectionable—by the pope's legate, John Tetzel, Luther was provoked into action. Following the custom of academic disputation, he composed ninety-five theses for discussion, setting forth a variety of arguments against the practice of indulgences. His protest hit especially at the papal claim to control the treasure of merits generated by the saints out of which credits could be drawn to cover sinners' debts. But the protest was really much broader, calling into question the whole structure of papal authority and the intermediary practice of the church. The ninety-five theses circulated rapidly, thanks to the newly invented printing press and the general discontent in Germany with papal rule.

Before long the pope condemned Luther for heresy, and Luther responded with additional protests and writings in which he rejected papal supremacy and the infallibility of the church councils. The pope finally excommunicated Luther. But in the rising tide of German nationalism, the Elector of Saxony took Luther under his protection, even when Emperor Charles V put Luther under the ban of the empire in 1521.

Luther's doctrine of **justification by faith** through God's grace meant that humans can do nothing to merit salvation—thus undercutting the ecclesiastical penitential system. It also called into question the monastic ideal—and thousands of men and women in Germany left the monasteries for secular life. Luther himself married a former nun, Katherine von Bora, and established the model of married clergy. A second important teaching, that scripture is the sole authority, led Luther to translate the Bible into German and, with the help of the printing press, make it available to all people (in the process creating a standard for the German literary language). This principle undercut the authority of the pope and the bishops to decide on matters of faith. His third important principle, the priesthood of all believers, put laypeople on a par with monks and priests and elevated the worth of secular vocations for Christians.

The Reformation Spreads Many others joined Luther in the protest (becoming known as Protestants), and the result was a drastic restructuring of the church throughout Christendom. Another important reformer was John Calvin (1509–1564), who provided a systematic presentation of Protestant thought in his landmark *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin started from the premise of the absolute sovereignty and glory of God, stressing also its corollary, the complete pervasiveness of sin in human nature. Salvation is by grace alone, although it is limited to those whom God has elected for salvation. Calvin carried the emphasis on God's sovereignty into the order of society, establishing a theocracy at Geneva in which the order of God governed all aspects of human society. Strict regulations were enforced: People could be punished for missing church or for adultery. Some holding unorthodox views, such as Michael Servetus, were burned at the stake for heresy. The Calvinist teachings spread to France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland, where it became known as Presbyterianism. From these places Calvinism also spread to America and became an important force in American **Protestantism**.

A more radical form of reformation found a representative in the fiery Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) of Zurich in Switzerland. He abolished the mass completely and removed pictures and images from the churches. He later died in battle leading a Protestant army in a civil war against the Catholics. After his death some carried the movement to a still more radical phase, promoting a church based strictly on the New Testament and specifically denying the validity of infant baptism (hence their name, Anabaptists). Since they insisted that every Christian should believe and be baptized for himself or herself, they posed a threat to the union of church and state, which still

existed even in Lutheran and Calvinist regions. So they were fiercely persecuted and nearly all the early leaders were put to death—an estimated fifty thousand martyrs by 1535. With their radical emphasis on individual faith, they were the forerunners of Baptists and Congregationalists in England who wanted to separate church and state functions. A portion of the Anabaptists were committed to pacifism, following teachings of Jesus. From these have derived the Mennonites, the Hutterites, and the Society of Friends, all deeply committed to peace and works of service.

In England, the ideas of the Reformation fanned the dissatisfaction with Rome that already existed. Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) broke with Rome over the pope's refusal to annul his marriage, and in 1534 he declared himself supreme head of the Anglican Church. He dissolved the monasteries, seized church property, and executed those who refused to recognize him as head of the church. Soon a new liturgical order, *The Book of Common Prayer*, was produced. There were also dissenters who wanted completely to purify the Anglican Church from all rituals left over from the Catholic Church. These Puritans, as they were called, followed Calvinistic teachings; the community was ruled by the elect saints and a strict moral code was enforced. Puritans achieved political power during the Cromwellian period, but with the Restoration and the reestablishing of The *Book of Common Prayer*, the Puritans joined the Baptists, Quakers, and other nonconformists outside the Church of England.

The Reformation movement also reached to the Roman Catholic Church, with reforming popes who corrected abuses and corruptions in the Roman church. Scandals such as the sale of indulgences were checked, and great care was taken to appoint men of high caliber to posts of bishops and abbots. The impact of the Protestant Reformation was so great and raised so many questions about traditional doctrines and practices that a general church council was needed to clarify Catholic teaching and discipline. The **Council of Trent** met in three sessions between 1545 and 1563, carefully spelling out the Catholic teaching on a great number of questions. Although there were hopes of reconciliation with Protestant reformers, the council basically held firm on all the traditional teachings regarding the authority of the popes, the celebration of the mass in Latin, reverence for the Virgin Mary and the saints, celibacy for the priests, and other such contested doctrines and practices. The pope was empowered to draw up an Index of Forbidden Books (to stop the spread of Protestant ideas). Positions on both sides of the Reformation were now solidified and all hope of reconciliation was gone.

The Catholic Reformation brought about a great renewal of faith and piety among the Catholic Christians. New religious societies were founded, among them the influential Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). Ignatius Loyola (ca. 1491–1556), a former Spanish military officer, founded the Jesuits for the purpose of propagating the Catholic faith, both in far-flung mission fields and at home in resistance to Protestantism. It was first of all through the Jesuits, for example, that the Christian faith was planted in East Asia. Among them, Francis Xavier (1506–1552) first brought Christianity to Japan in 1549, and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had a remarkable career as a missionary in China. Other Catholic orders also sent out missionaries and planted the Catholic Church firmly in India, the Philippines, and Central and South America. What the Catholic church lost in Europe was gained in the mission fields.

State Churches and Denominations With the Reformation, medieval Christendom came apart at the seams. Conflict erupted into open religious warfare. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 brought temporary peace with an influential principle: *cuius regio, cuius religio*—that is, the religion of the ruler became the religion of the realm. After more religious wars, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) drew the religious map of Europe, setting up the state churches of Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism, which have remained substantially the same ever since.

In the Eastern churches, the Reformation changes did not have as much immediate effect as in the West. The Greek Orthodox church was still struggling to hold back the Muslim-Turkish expansion. A reformation did take place in the Russian church under the great Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681), who worked to develop an educated clergy and to simplify the elaborate liturgy. These reforms, however, led to state interference in church affairs, and later Peter the Great (1676–1725) had the state take over the administration of the church. A further repercussion of the reform was a faction of "Old Believers" who refused to accept the reforms and split off from the main church.

In the immigrations to the New World, all these state and dissenting churches were represented, so that a central characteristic of American Christianity is its multiplicity of

denominations. In the American development, groups from the different state churches of Europe have sometimes united, sometimes further subdivided, to add to the complexity of the denominational structure. Furthermore, the American experience has created new denominations on the fringes, such as Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Christian Scientists.

An important development in the American Christian experiment is the practice of separation of church and state. The Pilgrims who came to America were from the dissenting Congregationalists of England, bringing the idea of separating church and state functions, both still under divine law. Eventually a separation of state and religion was written into the Constitution and has been a powerful influence in the development of American Christianity and of American law and politics.

Struggles with Modernity

Responses to the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment Christendom, disrupted by the various Reformation movements, now was confronted with the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. The discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus, scientists working in the heartland of Christianity, shook the traditional Christian views of God and the world. Questions were raised about the authority of the church and its tradition, humans no longer seemed at the center of things, and skepticism began to spread about miracles and supernatural events.

The Enlightenment brought in a new emphasis on reason and philosophy. Attempts to develop a rational religion independent of revelation resulted in deism, a philosophy that held that religion could be based on certain innate rational principles, such as the existence of a God and the certainty of reward or punishment for ethical or unethical deeds. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) proved by the use of reason that the existence of God cannot be proved by reason; he did hold, however, that religion belongs in the realm of morality, not reason.

Reacting against the sterile rationalism that was developing even in the Reformation churches, a revival of *pietism* began among the Bohemians and Moravians. Influenced by them, John Wesley (1703–1791) began preaching a revival of religious experience in England, emphasizing the need for an inner experience of Christ and a feeling of certainty of salvation. His movement, called Methodism, appealed widely to peoples recently moved to the cities in the Industrial Revolution. In great open-air meetings, Wesley eloquently preached about the dominion of sin and the warmth of God's love. Once a person was born again through the experience of salvation, he or she was assured he or she would never fall away and be damned. The Methodist movement spread rapidly, bringing a whole new repertoire of pietistic hymns and emotional experience across England and over to America.

Biblical Scholarship, Liberal Theology, and Fundamentalism One fruit of the new scientific, enlightened view of the world was scientific biblical scholarship, giving rise to a dramatic intellectual crisis in Christianity. The Bible had always simply been accepted as the inspired Word of God, providing the source of God's direct revelation. But, inevitably, the methods of critical historical research were turned to the biblical literature, and the results threw up questions about many cherished beliefs: the literal truth of miracle accounts, the veracity of historical descriptions in the Bible, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and even the reliability of the portrait of Jesus in the New Testament. Biblical scholars were investigating the holy writings just as they investigated other books, showing that the Bible contains legends, errors of fact, and later events read back into earlier periods.

Adding to the threat was another fruit of the scientific approach to human history: Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). The new evolutional theory of the development of the species seemed to reject the whole biblical account of creation and, moreover, suggested that humans were simply highly evolved beasts.

The force of this new scholarship and scientific perspective was powerful, and many Christian thinkers tried to deal with it positively. The Catholic Modernist movement attempted to reconcile biblical critical scholarship with traditional Catholic teaching. And Protestant thinkers constructed a liberal theology that advocated a humanitarian ethic built on progress and social concern, at the same time reviving a piety that centered on Jesus as the ideal human life.

But other Christians reacted strongly against the perceived threat, finding these products of science to be in deep conflict with their traditional faith. They insisted on holding firmly to their fundamental tenets. They interpreted the

Bible literally, including all its supernatural elements. Christians of this persuasion were found in all denominations. In an encyclical in 1907, Pope Pius X ruled against those who applied the new methods of research to the scriptures or theology, and among Protestants, the **Fundamentalist** movement was dedicated to a literal interpretation of the Bible. The large and sometimes bitter gap between liberal Christians and Fundamentalists has been an important factor in modern Christian history and is still very real today, particularly in American Christianity.

Christians in the World Today

Modern Theologies: Neo-Orthodoxy, Correlation, Aggiornamento In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, numerous challenges have confronted the Christian churches, focusing the direction of Christian thinking and action today. The rapid increase of industrialization, two catastrophic world wars, worldwide instant communication, the nuclear age, the growing disparity of rich and poor nations, liberation movements—such developments have set much of the church's agenda in modern times.

Liberal ideas of progress and humaneness were shattered by World War I, and Christian thinkers responded with neo-orthodox theologies centering on human sinful failure and the radical message of salvation, which comes from the transcendent God. Karl Barth (1886–1968), a Swiss Calvinistic theologian, used the methods of biblical scholarship to focus on the essential biblical message, which brings the self-revelation of God. Human reason is incapable of reaching out to God, but God through biblical self-revelation does the work of salvation for humans. All religions, including Christianity as a human institution, are man-made and stand under God's judgment. Only God's revelation in Christ brings renewal and salvation, Barth taught.

Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a German Protestant theologian, although agreeing with some of the concerns of Barth, taught that theology must practice a method of correlation: The modern world frames questions, and the theologian uses the resources of the Christian tradition to construct an "answering theology." Modern science, philosophy, art, and even the religions of the world become resources for Christian theology in this method of correlation.

Roman Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner likewise have constructed methods of relating Christian faith to the intellectual and social trends of the modern world. Pope John XXIII, sensing the moment of renewal, called the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) to carry through a visionary program of *aggiornamento*—bringing Catholic tradition and practice up-to-date while retaining their vitality and commitment. Liturgical reforms brought the use of the vernacular into worship in place of Latin. The council expressed concern and hope for peace in the world, asked for cooperation with other Christians, and spelled out a theology of respect for other religions.

Missions, Social Renewal, and the Ecumenical Movement Although the Roman Catholic Church, through its religious orders, was engaging in widespread missionary activity as early as the sixteenth century, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a surge of missionary activity by Protestant denominations as well. Missionaries went out to India, China, Africa, and throughout the world in a great march onward of Christian soldiers. Mission societies were formed in Europe and America to support foreign missionaries. It is true that some of this earlier missionary activity carried a flavor of Western superiority and sometimes accompanied political and economical exploitation. But Western Christians have learned from non-Western Christians, and today the mission outreach of the Christian churches is generally associated with service, partnership, and respect.

Christian awareness of oppression and poverty in the societies of the world today has grown in modern times. Today many Christians work for liberation: liberation of people from the tyranny of racism, liberation of women from roles of subjugation, and liberation of oppressed and poverty-stricken peoples in countries throughout the world. Social concern is high on the agenda of many of today's Christian churches. Other Christian groups, of course, resist what they see as too much involvement of the church in worldly affairs.

Experiences in the missionary movement and social concerns have led many Christians of today to promote Christian unity. The fragmentation of the church that occurred over the past several centuries is finally being reversed as Christians from many denominations work together in closer harmony. Growing out of this **ecumenical** (worldwide) **movement** was the World Council of Churches, founded in 1948 at Amsterdam, representing a degree of cooperation among most of the Protestant

churches. And the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church also set up a Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

Continuing ecumenical work has produced many breakthroughs in recent years. For example, many American Protestant churches, including the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Episcopalians, have declared themselves to be in fellowship with each other. And a historic development in world Christianity came in 1999 when leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Lutheran World Federation signed a "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," recognizing that Catholics and Lutherans today share a common understanding of this central doctrine that was so divisive at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

Struggles and Hopes Struggles still continue for Christian communities in the world. Christians living as minorities in some areas suffer persecution and violence, such as warfare between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, Arab Christians suffering both under Israeli occupation and Palestinian terrorists, Iraqi Christians being persecuted by Muslim extremists, and so on. In spite of ecumenical agreements in the area of Christian doctrine, Christians remain bitterly divided over certain social issues, such as ordination of women, abortion, homosexuality, and medical stem-cell research.

Yet Christians generally have a hopeful sense in this early part of the twenty-first century. Christian communities in developing areas of the world, such as Africa, Indonesia, and China, are full of vitality and are developing new understandings of Christianity in their cultural context. As Christians work together more closely throughout the world, new attitudes have begun to prevail concerning the links that hold all humankind together. The peace movement, transcending national boundaries, is promoted by many Christians in the East and West. Christians cooperate across denominational boundaries and work together with secular agencies and institutions to provide much needed service to suffering peoples all over the globe. And a new attitude of respect and dialogue with peoples of other religions is evident, at least among most Christian groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the Christian view of the scriptural story of God working through the people of Israel differ from the Jewish view?
2. What was the main content of Jesus' preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God? By what actions did he demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom?
3. According to the gospels, on what points did rabbi Jesus differ from the understanding of the Jewish tradition held by his fellow Jewish teachers?
4. Why is the Christian story so interested in the question of why Jesus died? What answers does it give to this question?
5. What was the main problem that developed between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians? What answer did Paul and others provide for this problem?
6. What were some of the ways in which Paul and others translated the gospel of Jesus from the Jewish context into the Greek-Hellenistic context?
7. How did Christianity become the religion of the Roman Empire? In what sense was monasticism a countercultural movement?
8. What were the basic issues in the theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries? How were these settled by the church councils, such as the ones at Nicea and Chalcedon?
9. What were some key differences in emphasis between the Eastern and Western churches?
10. What were the main issues that led to the Reformation movement in the sixteenth century? What would you consider to be Martin Luther's key teachings?
11. How did state churches and denominations develop? How did the United States come to have its constitutional policy of separation of church and state?
12. What were some of the effects of the Enlightenment and the rise of science on Christianity? What particular threat did some Christians feel in the scientific study of the Bible?
13. What is the ecumenical movement among the Christian churches today?

Chapter 10

Christian Worlds of Meaning

LOVING PARENT AND TRIUNE GOD

What is really ultimate? The Christian tradition, growing out of Judaism, has much the same view of God as that held by the Jews, up to a certain point. God is the one God of all peoples and ages, both transcendent and immanent, both lawgiver and merciful parent. Christians place a great emphasis on the mercy and compassion of God: "God is love," according to a well-known text (1 John 4:8). Jews also have this conception of God, so the difference is one of emphasis. Like Jews, Christians also see God as the judge who upholds standards of justice and punishes wrongdoing.

Seeing God's Face in Christ

The essential difference in the Christian vision comes at the point where the real heart and mind of God are revealed. For Jews, the way to really know God is in the covenant relationship, especially in the Torah given by God in love. For Christians, the way to really know what God is like is through the revelation in Jesus Christ; here God's divine face is shown for all to see. Apart from Christ, God remains the almighty, righteous creator beyond human knowledge or contact; in Christ, the mystery has come to dwell among humans, so they can experience God's own glory and truth and love. Thus, what is distinctive about the Christian vision of God is that the eternal brilliance of God's mystery is reflected through the "image" of God, Jesus Christ. The same scriptural writings used by the Jews now take on new meaning, for God's design and purpose can be seen in them in a new way.

Thus, Christian thinking about God starts from Jesus' own experience of God as revealed in the New Testament. One of Jesus' favorite terms for God was "Abba," by which he showed both his closeness to God and also God's character as the near and loving "father." This does not take away from the transcendence of God or the demands of the divine law. God is still the judge and evaluator of all, and one of Jesus' parables paints a vivid picture of the final judgment when God rewards the righteous with the eternal joys of heaven but consigns the wicked to everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:31–46). God does uphold justice. But what Jesus reveals about "Abba" is that God's real intention for all creatures is mercy and that God is involved in the dirt and grime of human existence to see to it that the design of mercy wins out.

God as the Loving Parent Among Jesus' many stories telling about God's real nature, the parable of the prodigal son stands out. Once there was a man, Jesus told, who had two sons; on the younger son's insistence, he gave him his inheritance. The younger son left home and squandered all in reckless living. Finally, starving and wishing he could eat with the pigs he was tending, he came to his senses, resolving to return home and confess to his father his sins, begging to be treated like a servant.

> So he set off and came to his father. But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. Running out, he flung his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you; no longer am I fit to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! get the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Then bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us feast and make merry."

The older son was angry that the younger son was rewarded for his riotous, sinful living whereas he himself got no special rewards for his years of dedicated service to his father. "Dear son, you are always with me," said the father, "and all my possessions are yours. It is fitting to celebrate and be glad, for your brother here was dead and has come alive, he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:11–32). This picture of God as a waiting father, standing on tiptoe, straining to see in the distance a glimpse of his wayward son returning, has colored the Christian view of God from beginning to end.

Christians, therefore, see God as the loving father and mother, wanting to create humans in order to be able to show love to them. They understand God as pained and hurt in the face of human rejection. As the righteous judge, God punishes them in anger, never, however, letting them go. As loving parent, God waits for the wayward children to return, sends warners and prophets, and finally goes out to bring them back, so the divine love may be fulfilled. God, who was present in so many ways through the people of Israel, finally became concretely present in human history in Jesus Christ as the forgiving parent who welcomes even sinners. One time, as Luke tells, the tax collectors and other bad characters were all crowding in to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes grumbled: "This fellow receives sinners and eats with them." And Jesus answered them with this parable:

> Which one of you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it? And finding it, he lifts it on to his shoulders rejoicing, and coming home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep."
>
> (Luke 15:1–7)

And that is what God is really like.

Because they see God present in Jesus, Christians understand the suffering and death of Jesus as God's way of becoming the "friend of sinners" in a complete way. Just as God has been present to the world through the servant people Israel, now God is present to the world in the new servant Jesus, through him receiving all the evil and sin of the world and absorbing it in Godself, so that finally both divine justice *and* mercy might prevail.

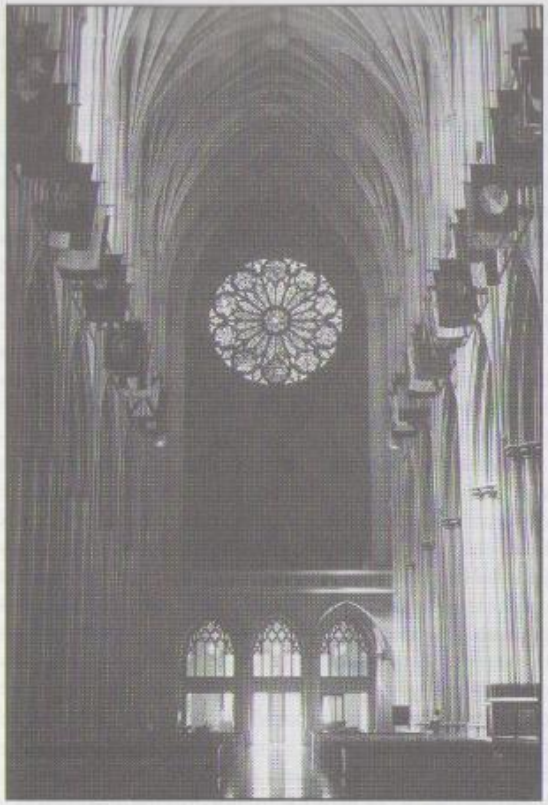
One God, Three Persons: The Trinity

Because Christians believe they have seen God's true nature revealed in Jesus Christ, they call Jesus the "Son of God." Since God was present in the world in a powerful and saving way in Jesus, Christians say God was "incarnated" in Jesus: God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Whereas this teaching arose out of the early Christians' experience of Jesus' death and resurrection, it took several centuries of experiencing and reflecting for Christians to be able to explain what they meant by calling Jesus the "Son of God." It was not until the church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. that satisfactory formulations were devised to say what needed to be said to guard from error and misunderstanding, but at the same time not to say too much about the mystery of God. It was partly this need to understand and preserve the experience of God's presence in Christ that Christians, much more than Jews, started theologizing, thinking and reasoning about God and God's work. Out of this theologizing came the doctrine of the Trinity: God is one God in three persons.

In all of this thinking, Christians tried carefully to insist on the unity of God. But their experience had taught them that God, eternally unified in self, is present and works in the created world in a number of aspects or modes or "persons" (from the Latin *persona*, the masks worn by actors playing roles on the stage). Using biblical terms, Christians called these aspects or persons by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what do these words designate about the one God? The words of the **Nicene Creed**, formulated in the early church councils, guide Christians in understanding the mystery of the Triune God.

The Nicene Creed The first statement in the Nicene Creed emphasizes the unity of God: "We believe in one God." Then the creed goes on to specify the several faces of God: first, "the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen." The Father is God's face as creator, almighty and transcendent, Lord of the whole universe. God created everything in the world, and God's purpose is justice and mercy for all.

The second article of the Nicene Creed goes on to specify the face of God as it is reflected in the Son:



The soaring gothic arches and vaults of the National Cathedral in Washington draw attention heavenward, symbolizing the presence of God.

> We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all things were made. For us humans and our salvation he came down from heaven and became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures, and he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

What is this statement saying about the one God? It insists very carefully that the Son of God is totally and completely one with God: He was not created at a certain time but has always been God, not of a different being from the Father. The Son is also, as was said of the Father, the creator of all. But in this face of God we see the incarnation: "For us" God came down and was born a human and died on the cross. God became the redeemer, not solely in the form of the transcendent God but also in the person of humanity. In Christ, the Son of God, the divine nature and the human nature were united, so God could redeem the human race. The Son rose in victory and now rules the world with the Father. With the Father, the Son will be the judge of all to fulfill justice and mercy completely.

The Bible also tells of another face of God's presence in the world, the "Spirit." So the third article of the Nicene Creed specifies:

> We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Whereas the Father represents God as the creator and sustainer, and the Son represents God as the redeemer, the Holy Spirit represents God's ongoing spiritual presence in the world and in humans. Through the Spirit comes life; through the Spirit comes revelation and guidance. This is the presence of God that prompts human longings and prayers, that sustains them in their doubts, that cleanses and renews them. The Spirit guides and unifies the church, works through baptism and forgiveness, and sustains the faithful in hope. And so the Spirit is worshiped together with the Father and the Son—one God in three persons.

Christians do not find it easy to explain the meaning of the doctrine of the Triune God, for these terms, many of them derived from Greek philosophy, are limited in their appropriateness to describe the mystery of God's own being. But Christians have found this idea of one God in three persons a helpful and necessary one to express the way in which they have experienced the mystery of God—and that helpfulness is not so much in rational thought as in worship and praise of God.

The Problem of Evil in the World As to the problem of how God could allow evil and suffering in this world, that God created and loves, Christians use many of the same responses as Jews. Out of love God disciplines, punishing so people will repent. God tests people to refine their faith. Evil is but the absence of good. The sufferings of the moment will cause the eternal rewards to shine more brilliantly. Evil comes as a result of the freedom that God has allowed. But there is one more specifically Christian response to pain and suffering: In all our suffering, God suffers. Through the cross of Christ, evil is overcome by God's own submission to the evil that works so much suffering and ruin in creation. This answer does not explain evil away or give a reason for its existence. But it does help Christians to bear it, trusting that even at this point God is with them as their loving father—and as their loving mother, Christians say, becoming more aware of the rich feminine images of God in the Bible as well as the traditional masculine ones.

CREATION AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

What is the meaning of life? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Christians, as they think about creation and the role of humans in the world, largely take over the Jewish view put forth in the Hebrew scriptures as in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. That is, the one God created the universe in an orderly fashion, determined it all to be good, and placed humans as the crown of creation, to play the role of God's representative within this good world.

The Nature of Creation

The Christian view of creation is succinctly summed up by Paul when he writes, "From him [God] and through him and to him are all things; to him be glory forever" (Romans 11:36). Creation had a beginning "from" God, out of nothing. God is the only being who is necessary, existing self-sufficiently; all other things are contingent and could easily not exist. This world is entirely God's creature, dependent on God for the gift of being and life. Creation is "through" God, continuing through God every day. Every instant the whole universe exists in the power of God's activity as the preserver. And creation is "to" God; it has a goal, a future that centers in God. There is a design or purpose to this universe inherent in the will of the creator who brought it into existence. But that means there is a demand, a law built into creation, which leads it to fulfill the design of the creator.

Creation in Christ What is most distinctive about the Christian view of creation, as compared to the Jewish view with which it shares many points, is that Christians understand creation from the point at the center of their faith: the revelation of God's love and mercy in Christ. Why is there something and not nothing? What caused God to create? Love, Christians answer, the love that is seen in Jesus Christ. The Letter to the Colossians emphasizes this Christocentric view so strongly that it says, "Everything has been created through him [Christ] and for him. He exists before everything, and everything holds together in him" (Colossians 1:16–17).

Therefore, Christians read back from Christ to understand God's creation of the world and of humans. They understand the stories about creation in the Book of Genesis from this point of view, emphasizing above all God's parental love. God wanted a world. God wanted humans as children to respond to the divine love in personal trust and fellowship. So God's great love overflowed in creativity, and the world and all that is in it came into being. All of God's creatures are special, but humans were made as very special creatures, so God could express love by entering into a close personal relationship with them. God lovingly created the first human, as told in Genesis 2, of the dust of the ground, breathing "spirit" or breath into him, making a woman as a fellow human and, thus, choosing humans of all the creatures to be special partners in a loving relationship.

Since Christ is the focus of God's revelation and reveals God's deepest design and intention, Christians see all God's law or design summed up in Christ, who is the "end" or fulfillment of both God's love and justice. In answer to a lawyer's question about what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said, quoting the Torah, that loving God with one's whole being and loving one's neighbor as one's self sum up all the teaching of the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:35–40). This means that the law of creation is the law of love. For it is finally love that moves people to be fruitful, helpful, and creative, to invest themselves in their families, their work, and their art. Whatever is valuable and creative derives from such personal investment and love—and that is first and foremost true of God and the creation that was lovingly brought into existence.

A Good and Right Creation Christians affirm with Genesis 1 the essential "all-rightness" of the world. God gives the world not only its existence but also its value. This universe is ultimately right and moral, not just accidental and neutral. All God's creatures are intrinsically valuable, not only humans but also animals and all the world of nature. And life within this created, material world is meaningful and full of value and significance. "Glory be to God for dappled things," wrote Gerald Manley Hopkins, expressing the Christian's delight in all aspects of God's good creation. "God saw everything that he had made," Genesis 1 reports, "and it was very good." That includes matter, food, drink, play, and bodily appetites, including sex.

God the creator has a design and purpose for creation, Christians believe, and humans play a central role in that design, as God works through human history to accomplish that purpose. That means that this is a moral universe, for it is fashioned according to God's design. God's love is balanced with justice or rightness throughout creation. That law of creation is known and felt by humans in their natural experience, so that all have a knowledge of God's will. The good life according to God's design, then, includes both love and justice, as lived by humans in loving and serving God in faith and obedience.

Christians affirm that reason is a special gift from God. Since humans know from their own nature and conscience what God's basic design (law) is, they ought to be able reasonably to fulfill that design, living in love and justice with fellow creatures. But human reason is also driven by other factors, especially by the will that turns a person back upon himself or herself in pride and selfishness—the condition that Christians call sin. Therefore, human reason is an ambiguous guide to living the good life and fulfilling God's real design in creation. A minimal kind of justice and order can perhaps be created by humans at their best, using their reason and effort—but the real meaning of creation, the wholeness of existence full of both justice *and* love in relation to the creator and also to the fellow creatures, is beyond the reach of human striving on the basis of reason. Something more is needed and that must come as grace from God's side.

Sin and Separation from God

Why do people do evil and destructive things? In spite of the strong feeling that humans were created in the image of God, perfect and good as God wanted them to be, most Christians emphasize the sinfulness of human nature more forcefully than do Jews or Muslims. It is not just a matter of an evil tendency, which can be controlled or mastered by one who has the mind to do so. Rather, there is a deep, complete fracture in the very nature of humans, causing separation from God and inevitable sinfulness in human existence. Sin for Christians is not just an act done by a person; sin is the very being of humans, the state of alienation from God and God's design.

Paradise and the Fall into Sin The story of origins in Genesis 2 and 3 is especially important for Christians, and they read it somewhat differently from Jews. God created humans to be partners, perfect and in full harmony with all of creation, serving God and taking care of creation. God provided all that is needed for a full, happy life: a garden of delight, work to fulfill human existence, animals to be named by humans, a fellow human for companionship—above all, close fellowship with God. God did give a command to the man and the woman in the garden: "You may freely eat from every tree in the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat" (Genesis 2:16–17). Why? God gave no reason. But clearly this is important in the human relation to God: A command sets a limit, and it requires a response on the humans' part. No longer can they maintain their dreaming innocence—God wants real partners. The command is the opening of the way for humans to transcend their own inner limits and relate to the power outside themselves. God stands over against us humans as "you," so that we can no longer only think incessantly of "me." Now, with God's command inserted into human life, the humans become aware both of God and of themselves as free agents making decisions, acting on them, and taking responsibility.

This story is told about the first man and the first woman, but in the Christian view it really is the story of all humans. God encounters them as personal Lord, and they are faced with a decision: to obey or to disobey the divine will. Humans are always confronted with this decision: whether to respond to God as personal Lord and Master in their role as creatures, or to turn to their own way in defiance of God's will. That they are free to decide shows that God has entered into a personal relationship with them. That they consistently turn to their own way shows their inevitable human sin and rebellion against the creator.

This inevitable human sin and rebellion is depicted in Genesis 3 in the well-known story of the "fall." Some Christians take this story literally as an account of the first human pair and their fall into a sinful state. Most understand it as a symbolic description of the natural state of humans: created to be partners of God but always choosing the selfish and rebellious course. Whether read literally or symbolically, the story in Genesis 3 presents a powerful portrait of human existence as seen in the Christian view.

The man and the woman were roused out of their dreaming innocence by the snake, the "wisest" of all the creatures God had made. Whereas the man and the woman had not done any thinking or deciding yet, just taking care of the garden, cleaving to each other unashamedly, and taking walks with God in the garden, the snake had been thinking: "Did God really say that you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" (3:1). The snake exaggerates, and the woman exaggerates also in her answer. But the crucial step is made: The humans begin to think and to desire and to exercise their freedom—in rebellion against God's command.

This decision in rebellion against God disrupted the human situation with God in every area of human existence, since God is the basis of all that makes for human existence. If the relation to God the creator is disrupted, all else is also shattered. When God comes to walk in the garden in the cool of the day, the humans hide in their shame. Now enmity breaks out with the animals, nature no longer cooperates with the man in producing food, and the woman experiences great pain and risk of death in the natural function of childbirth. The man and the woman are alienated from each other: they cover themselves with clothes, they blame each other, and the man usurps the rule over the woman in this disrupted state. Finally, the humans are driven from God's presence out into the ruptured world of human existence, with no way back to the garden.

Originating Sin The Christian interpretation of this story sees in it the "fall" of humankind into a sinful state, blotting out or distorting the image of God in which they were created. Paul writes that "sin came into the world through one man"; now, however, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 5:12; 3:23). Augustine interpreted this state of humankind as original sin, the condition of all humans of not being able not to sin.

There has been considerable disagreement among Christians about the nature of **original sin**. Some Christians have followed Augustine in thinking of original sin in terms of a fallen nature passed on physically through birth from one generation to the next, starting from the first human parents. Again, some Christians tend to say sin originates with the devil, who tempted the first parents and who still goes about as a roaring lion seeking people to devour. Most Christians today try to find ways of thinking about sin that do not blame our sinfulness on Adam and Eve or on the devil—sin is something that belongs to our own nature and we must take responsibility for it.

One way to understand original sin would be as "originating" sin, that is, the fundamental tendency in all human nature to follow one's self-will, placing oneself as creature in the place of God the creator. The originating sin, thus, produces a kind of idolatry, worshiping oneself instead of God. The human will is in bondage, curved in upon itself.

The Christian idea of sin is not easy to understand, but it tries to uphold a number of important meanings. For one thing, to say that sin is original means that sin is inborn, a condition all humans share without exception. There is no one who is perfect and sinless in this view.

This means, at the same time, that there are no persons who are worse sinners than others. Of course, there are some who do more hurtful, destructive actions than others; the sins people commit do have varying gravity and consequences. But all are equal in sharing the same sinful human nature. And, therefore, if one can be redeemed, all can equally be redeemed. There is no human, even the worst murderer and rapist, who is so despicable as to be nonredeemable. In fact, sometimes one who has obviously committed a lot of sins is more aware of his or her predicament and need for God's help than one who has lived a "good" life and feels confident of personal merit before God. Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector, to give a lesson to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Both went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like evil men, especially this tax collector. But the tax collector stood far off, eyes cast down, beating his breast, and said, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:9–14). Whereas there may be differences of sins in terms of evil effects, there is no difference in sinful nature: All have an equal share of original sin.

The idea of original sin also means that sin involves the whole person, originating from the center of one's being.

It is not that sin comes from certain animal drives and lusts, or that it has to do mainly with one's lower members below the belt. All members, faculties, hearts, minds, wills, and whatever it is that makes humans what they are, all share in the sinful nature. There is nothing humans can do, then, no matter how noble or intellectual or creative, that is not at the same time contaminated by human sin.

The Christian view of sin sounds pessimistic and gloomy—and so it is, pointing to the condition of humans separated from God. But it should be noted that this idea places the big emphasis on humans' sinful nature, not so much on the various things humans do. Therefore, this is a freeing and positive idea as well. It frees a person to live courageously in this world amid the ambiguities of human existence. Acknowledging one's sinful nature—and, therefore, the need to turn to God for help and mercy—a person can live with courage and hope in the ups and downs of human existence, knowing that pleasure and drink and sex and wealth and everything else are not bad in themselves. It is our sinful nature, Christians believe, that originates sin—and the only help for that comes from God.

The Wages of Sin God does hate sin, however, demanding that humans be perfect as God is perfect. So, Christians believe, the sin that humans share calls forth God's wrath and punishment. Every individual sin, of course, has its own consequences. But by tracing sins back to a sinful nature, it is possible for Christians to talk of consequences that all humans share equally. These consequences are spiritual "death" or separation from God, a fragmented and warped human life, and ultimately eternal death and punishment.

Paul writes that "through one man sin came into the world, and through sin came death, and so death spread to all people, because all have sinned." Again, he says that "the wage for sin is death" (Romans 5:12; 6:23). This does not mean creaturely finitude is punishment for sin—only God is eternal, and all creatures are limited by beginning and end. But Christians use the image of "death" to refer to the separation and estrangement from God that sin causes. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden; people, by worshiping themselves instead of God, separate themselves from the source of all life and love and wholeness. Cutting the lifeline to God—which is what sin does—means spiritual death.

And such spiritual death, in the Christian view, affects everything we are and do as humans. Cut off from God, we become hurtful and hateful in our relations with each other. People abuse and exploit the wonderful world of nature that God created good and gave over to them to take care of. They find no harmony and peace in their fragmented lives. Their creaturely limits, symbolized by death, cause great anxiety, suffering, and a feeling of hopelessness.

Christians believe that death is not the end of human existence but that the consequences of sin will continue in the world to come. God is the judge of all, and God's evaluation of sinfulness will bring about the final consequence: eternal death and punishment. Christians of earlier times depicted the horrors and everlasting torments of the damned in hell by graphic words and pictures (read Book 21 of Augustine's *City of God*). Many Christians today have problems with these grotesque portraits. But what they do show is the seriousness of sin in God's sight—and the need for humans to receive help and forgiveness from God.

THE PATH: SALVATION BY GRACE

The question of salvation is a central question for Christians, who see all human nature enslaved to sinfulness. God has a high design for humans; they are to be perfect in love and fellowship with the creator. But in the face of human rebellion and idolatry, this design becomes a demand that is beyond the human possibility. Humans are lost and helpless, cut off from God, without hope in the world. And so the most important question becomes, How can we be saved from this sin and punishment?

Saved by Jesus Christ

The story of the jailer at Philippi is a familiar one to Christians. With Paul and Silas bound in his prison at Philippi, the jailer experienced great terror when an earthquake occurred, which he thought had allowed his prisoners to escape. There was nothing left for him to do except to take his own life. But Paul and Silas stopped him, for none of them had tried to escape. Trembling with fear, the jailer fell down before them and asked, "Men, what must I do in order to be saved?" And they answered simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, both you and your household." He believed, and he and all his family were baptized. Then he took them up to his house, washed their wounds, set a meal before them, and rejoiced with all his household (Acts 16:25–34).

The starting point in the Christian vision of salvation is the recognition that ultimately humans cannot attain salvation by themselves; they cannot on their own restore the relationship with God that has been disrupted through sin. To say this is not to deny that there are good things that people can do, in the sense of righteousness and justice in relationship with fellow humans. God's law is sufficiently in our nature that we do by nature know justice from injustice, and even our self-interest will lead us to try and establish a society of order and fairness. But to be in the right relationship with God is the key to salvation, and this, most Christians believe, is beyond our human possibilities because of our fundamental sinful nature.

It is at this point that the Christian tradition diverges significantly from both Judaism and Islam. For Jews, as we have seen, the divinely given path of Torah is the path of transformation; following it and performing its mitzvot bring blessing, joy, and salvation. For Muslims likewise, as discussed later, following God's law is the path of transformation that brings felicity in this world and the next. But in Christian understanding, the law (God's demands on humans, as revealed in the Torah) cannot be a path of salvation, for it demands of us what we cannot do. "You shall be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy" is the demand of God's law. But no human is or can be holy, and so following the way of the law cannot restore the relationship with God; it cannot bring salvation. In fact, Paul argued that the law becomes an accuser, showing us our sin every time we fail to keep a precept perfectly.

Most Christians believe that God's law does have the function of maintaining some form of order and justice in human society, curbing people's wickedness and guiding them toward God's design of justice. But more importantly with respect to the path of salvation, the law shows the depths of the estrangement from God. Whereas in Jesus' parable the Pharisee praying in the temple thought about his merits in keeping the Torah, the tax collector thought of that same divine law and could only beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." And Jesus says the tax collector is the one who went home justified by God—that is, recognition of sinfulness is the first step in turning toward the redemption that comes from God. For as long as a person tries to justify himself or herself—that is, tries to claim worth and merit before God on the basis of what he or she does—that person remains trapped in a no-win situation. It is a tendency of human nature to try and claim worth in oneself, to justify one's existence—whether through work, determining self-worth by how much one earns, through one's social standing among friends, or through some other accomplishment. God's law breaks through all this and shows us how futile it is to try and justify ourselves by our performance in life.

When we abandon our attempts at self-justification and turn to God, Christians believe, we find we are justified and saved through Jesus Christ. But how does this happen? How does Jesus save us? To understand this mystery of salvation, Christians start from the testimony of the scriptures. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). Just as Jews look back to many acts of salvation by which God delivered the sacred people, so Christians believe that God was also at work through Jesus Christ to bring salvation for all peoples.

This means, first of all, that whatever happened in Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's whole plan and design to restore humankind to the relationship of love and fellowship with God. Of all the images in the scriptures about God saving the people, the Jewish image of sacrificing a lamb to make atonement for the sins of the people has appeared to many Christians to set the pattern by which God brings salvation. Symbolically the sins of the people were placed on the lamb; the lamb became a substitute, bearing and, thus, abolishing the sins of the people. Christians look to the prophecy of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 53), telling of the suffering servant of God, on whom God will place the sins and the burdens of all to make atonement for them. This pattern of **atonement** reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, atoning for the sins of all humankind by his sacrifice on the cross, and by this atonement bringing about the restoration of the loving relationship between God and humans.

But even this image of the atonement does not really explain *how* this salvation takes place. In trying to understand it further, Christians have used additional metaphors and images. For example, Christ can be envisioned as a victorious king, triumphing over the powers of hell by his cross. Or he can be viewed as the sinless one who paid the debt of sin that we all owe before God the judge, whose scales of justice must be balanced. Or, again, Jesus Christ can be understood as the mediator who reconciled the two parties at war with each other, God and humans. These and other images of the atonement are all attempts to explain the same reality, the experience of salvation and restoration through Jesus Christ.

Every metaphor or human analogy has its limitations when used to understand a divine mystery. Are we to think that in some magical way the sins all people have committed are somehow heaped on Christ's shoulders as he died on the cross? Are we really to think there are evil powers of hell that the Son of God had to do battle with and defeat in order to free humans from their grasp? Are we really to think of God as an angry judge, insisting on someone paying the debt all people owe so the scales of justice can be balanced? Are we really to think of a war between God and humans that has to be settled by a mediator? Taking any one of these images in a strict literal fashion can lead to some less than Christian ideas about God and God's relation to humans. Yet such human images are helpful, and Christians have found much meaning in all these images by which to understand the atonement.

God So Loved the World The basic motif behind all these ways of understanding the atonement is God's love demonstrated concretely in Christ. God is holy and hates sin—for sin ruins God's good creation, and it destroys fellowship and love. It causes suffering, pain, and death, not just in this present existence but also in the world to come. Something has to be done from God's side, Christians believe. God has to intervene as God really is, as both holy judge and as lover of all creation. But to be a real lover of humankind, God becomes vulnerable, as all lovers do.

How does God, the transcendent creator, become a lover for humans? In the Christian experience, it is by God taking a body in the created world with which to bear the sin of the world. The demands of justice and judgment are met, according to the truth that sin has consequences. But the Christian good news is that God took these consequences on Godself in Jesus Christ, replacing the demand and punishment of the law with the power of love. That means God's love must be a suffering love; God suffers for the sins of the world in the servant, Jesus Christ. It is God's love that does not allow giving up humankind to judgment and condemnation, for

> God is love. In this the love of God was manifested to us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might have life through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he has loved us and sent his son as an expiation for our sins.
>
> (I John 4:8–10)

Nuns carry palm branches and recite prayers in this Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives. They are marking the beginning of Holy Week, commemorating the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus Christ is, thus, the means through which God brings the divine love into the world for the salvation of humankind.

In the end, all the consequences of sin are summed up in death: "The wage of sin is death." So the atonement made by Christ also brings triumph over the fear of death. Jesus Christ is raised from the dead! In the perspective of the Bible, a resurrection from the dead is not utterly amazing, where God's power is concerned. There are scriptural stories of people who escaped death or were raised from the dead; Jesus himself raised people from the dead. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ is unique in that this is the first fruit, the foretaste of the world to come in which death is abolished. It is God's stamp of approval on the redemption worked out through the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ.

Who Is Christ? So who was or is this Jesus Christ? Together with the doctrine of the atonement, Christian theology stresses the doctrine of the incarnation, with its classic expression in the Gospel of John: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). More than any other teaching of Christianity, this teaching of the

incarnation of God in the human being Jesus has caused lines of defense and objection to be established by both Jews and Muslims. How can God become a human? How can God have a son? What does this teaching of the incarnation mean?

This is a question faced by the early Christians, and by Christians ever since. Is this Jesus Christ a human, or is he God, or is he a God-human mixture, or what? The answer to this question is the Christian doctrine of Christology, thinking about the nature of Christ. The important thing, in the Christian view, is to see this question in relation to the doctrine of **soteriology**, the belief in salvation through Jesus Christ. That is where Christians start in their religious experience; through Jesus Christ they experience the love of God in its fullness, meeting God present with saving power. And, therefore, they think of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, through whom God's love and salvation are experienced within creaturely existence in this world.

For several hundred years, Christian thinkers struggled with the need—and the difficulty—of expressing clearly just who Jesus Christ is in both the divine and the human dimensions. The need was to keep the good news of salvation from becoming something else—another law or demand, a magical story, or the like. The difficulty was the uniqueness of this mystery: How does one even begin to talk about God taking human sin on Godself? Finally, Christians decided that in order to maintain the good news of salvation, it is necessary to teach that Jesus Christ is both fully and completely God and fully and completely human.

There were other options, of course. Some Christians (led by Arius and, thus, called Arians) were teaching that Jesus was really human, created to be God's son and savior of the world. But Christians found that to restrict Jesus from being fully God causes problems for soteriology; how could the suffering and death of a mere human, no matter how noble, make atonement for the sin of the whole world? Only if God makes this atonement could it bring to all people the promise of forgiveness and salvation. Another group of Christians approached the question from the other side from the Arians; the **Docetists** (from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning to "seem" or to "appear") taught that Jesus Christ was fully God but just "seemed" to be a human with the mask of flesh and blood. But Christians found that if this view was followed, the whole notion of Jesus Christ sharing human sufferings and bearing human burdens and sins would become meaningless. For only one who is truly human can experience the suffering and death that humans must experience.

So Christian thinkers decided that the only way to preserve the good news of salvation through Christ is to talk of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human, two natures united in the one person. Most Christians do not pretend to be able to explain rationally how this can be so. But they believe it because it is the good news of salvation. Christ took human sin, suffering, and death on himself as the human brother, making atonement for the sin of the whole world as the divine Lord. And still today, Christians believe, Christ lives and rules as fully God and fully human. He sympathizes with human weaknesses because he knows human nature, and he intercedes for humans and declares them righteous by virtue of his divine power.

The Way of Faith

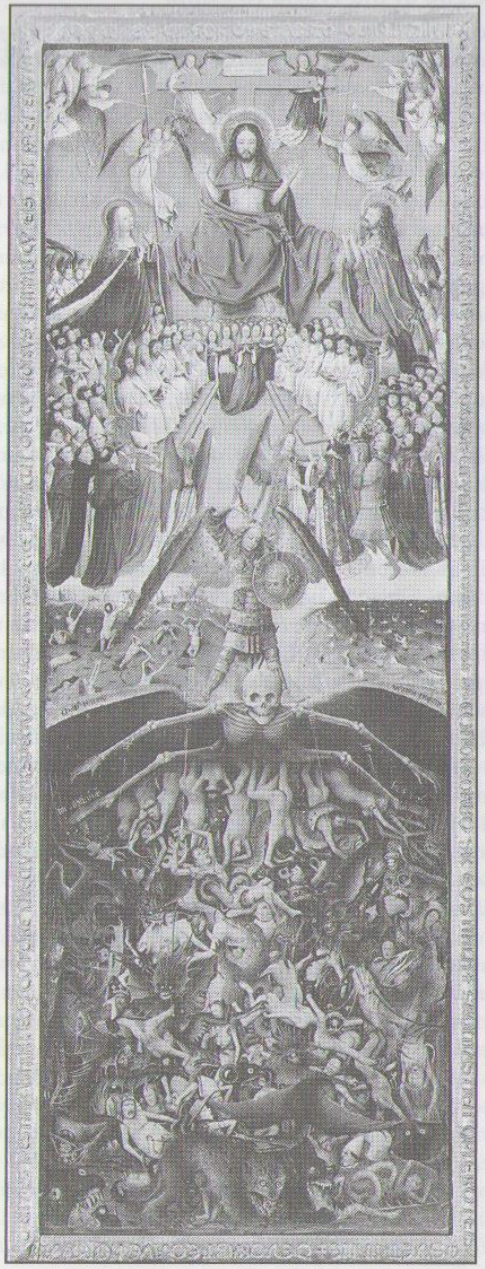
The path for salvation is necessarily a two-way affair, even in Christianity, and in the Christian vision the appropriate human response is faith, which is the accepting of the grace that comes from God in Christ. It is not a "work" in the sense of fulfilling God's law and demand or justifying oneself by some worthwhile deeds. Rather, faith is saying yes to God's love, accepting the divine promise that we have been reconciled to God. This is what Christians call the doctrine of **justification by faith**. Faith is not primarily an intellectual act, although it does involve mind and reason. It is the movement of the will in response to God's love, trusting that God has made all things whole again.

There is an objective, intellectual side to faith, having to do with ideas and doctrines about God and humans. But the primary meaning of having faith, Christians believe, is coming into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord. For Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me." And again, he said, "If someone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him" (John 14:6, 23). When the good news of Jesus Christ is told, God is promising, "I love you, and I have saved you." Faith is accepting that promise and getting in on the story of Christ, making that story one's own story. As a person responds in faith and trust, Christ makes his home with him or her. The person's life is filled with Christ's love, and his or her death is shared with Christ, trusting Christ's promise that he or she will also share Christ's resurrection and eternal life. This personal relation with Christ is the overcoming of the fracture of sin. It is reconciliation with God.

Salvation through faith is a lifelong process, and Christians, like Jews and Muslims, make use of prayer and worship as the means toward this transformation. Baptism is an important ritual for Christians, for it symbolizes the inclusion of the new person in the family of God. Through baptism the person dies to the sinful nature and is reborn with a Christlike nature, for Christ dwells in him or her. Throughout one's lifetime, the knowledge that "I have been baptized" provides comfort and hope whenever doubts and anxieties arise. Hearing the word of the gospel is a reminder over and over of the story of Christ that has become each Christian's story. Sharing in the Eucharist (Lord's Supper) is a concrete experience of being united with Christ through this sacred meal. And prayer in the name of Christ keeps the new relationship with God alive and well. Christians speak of these practices as the "means of grace," believing that as one participates in them, the Holy Spirit is at work in one's heart, continually transforming one's sinful nature so one's faith and love become more perfect.

The struggle of life continues, however. Christians realize that until the end of life a person will always be *both* a sinful human being *and* a redeemed human being. But though sin continues, God's forgiveness continues. So we can live courageously, Christians believe, not having constantly to prove our worth before God and, thus, free to live in the world and show love to one another as God loved us.

It is at this point in the path of transformation that Christians talk of the value of work and actions. Works grow out of faith. People who have experienced God's love and grace will be inwardly motivated to demonstrate that kind of love and grace also in their lives—freely, not for sake of reward. Christians speak of the process of the *sanctification* or making holy of our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our faith and our experience of God's love shape and mold our hearts, minds, and wills, so that more and more we live Christlike lives in the world. "We become what we are," Christians might say: By faith we *are* saved, and now we go about becoming the kind of persons who demonstrate in their lives what that salvation means.



The last judgement, as envisioned in this painting by Van Eyck. Jan van Eyck, (active by 1422, died 1441), 'The Last Judgment'. Tempera and oil on canvas, transferred from wood. Panel: 22 1/4 x 7 3/4 inches (56.5 x 19.7 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1933.

The Life of the World to Come

Like Jews and Muslims, Christians also believe in the world to come: resurrection, **judgment day**, and eternal life in heaven. The eternal life that begins now through faith in Christ is not something that death can snuff out. Christ died, but he broke the power of death and rose again on the other side of death. Now he rules as the Lord over all. All who are united with him in faith already experience that resurrected life in this world, through worship of the risen Lord. But Christ has promised that he will come again to judge all people. Christians understand this as a word of promise rather than of threat, for the judge is none other than the Savior, the friend of sinners and our brother. And he has promised that he will say, "Come, you blessed ones of my Father, inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for you since the world was founded" (Matthew 25:34).

Traditional Christian piety has constructed many imaginative descriptions of paradise in heaven and the bliss of eternal life, descriptions that are still meaningful to modern Christians even though the cosmology underlying them is no longer held. Many modern Christians have problems with the notion of heaven as an exclusionary place, from which the vast majority of God's human race will forever be banned. They ask, could the loving parent of all peoples allow heaven for only that small part of humankind who had the good fortune to hear about Christ and believe in him, while consigning all other peoples who have lived on this earth to eternal punishment? And so some Christians believe that God in ultimate divine mercy will not allow anyone to be lost, even as other Christians hold to the traditional view that large numbers of unbelievers will be excluded from eternal salvation.

This is a difficult question. The attitude of many Christians is to leave these things up to God's eternal love and mercy. God will judge, and the judge will be none other than the Savior. The important point remains that eternal life comes by God's grace, not on account of one's deserving merit. And this means that life in heaven, too, is a gift of grace, not a reward. The prospect of life in heaven is not to be the motivation for becoming a Christian. It is God's love that stirs one to the life of faith, and heaven is simply the last image in the process of salvation. Just as God at the beginning said the creation is "very good," so at the end the promise of eternal life in heaven is God's way of saying that the new creation of salvation is very good.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What key aspects of God do Christians believe are revealed in Jesus Christ as the "image" of God?
2. Discuss how Christians can believe in the unity of God and still talk about the Trinity.
3. Explain what the Nicene Creed states about each of the three "persons" of God.
4. Why did God create the world, in the Christian view? What is the role of humans?
5. How can the world be a good world created by God and yet also a world full of sin and evil? Is God's love or God's justice predominant?
6. What sort of theological interpretation do Christians typically give to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?
7. How does the Christian doctrine of sin (called "original sin") differ from the Jewish view of sin?
8. How does the Christian view of God's Law differ from that of Jews and Muslims?
9. What do you think Christians mean when they talk about being "saved" by Christ? Explain the idea of atonement.
10. What were the views of the Docetists and the Arians about the nature of Christ? What is the accepted orthodox doctrine?
11. On the Christian path, what is the role of faith? Of doing good works?
12. Discuss the question of whether some people will be excluded from heaven. Why is this a troubling question for some Christians? How is it answered differently, and why?

Chapter 11

Ritual Practices and the Good Life for Christians

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND RITUAL

How can we find new power for life? Christians, like Jews, believe that all life is to be worship of God. How Christians live is based on the teachings and the example of Jesus, focusing on love. God is to be worshiped and praised, both in acts of love toward God and in good deeds of love toward others. Jesus, quoting the Torah, said there are two great commandments: to love God with all one's heart, strength, and mind; and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Of course, God is worshiped not because this has been commanded, but out of love and gratitude. Christ lives within, and this provides the motivation and power to live a life in worship of God.

Breaking Bread and Praising God

We are told that the earliest Christians "day by day, both attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, partook of food with joyous and simple hearts, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46–47). From the beginning, Christians followed the Jewish tradition of assembling together to pray and praise God, also "breaking bread" in their homes, that is, observing the Lord's Supper, which Jesus instituted during his last Passover meal with his disciples. From these earliest practices evolved the distinctive Christian forms of communal worship, including the Sunday service of prayer and Eucharist and the cycle of holy days and festivals throughout the year.

It should be noted that Christian groups in the modern world differ significantly from one another in their attitudes and practices regarding worship and rituals. Christians do not have a commonly accepted pattern set down by divine law, as is the case in Judaism and Islam. Even those rituals and ceremonies of worship mentioned in the New Testament have been interpreted differently in the various Christian communions. Some groups do have "canon law," which governs the conduct of public worship. Other groups take an approach of freedom and spontaneity, following, of course, their own accepted pattern of worship. It is possible to speak of "liturgical" and "nonliturgical" church bodies. Those that are liturgical place a good deal of emphasis on the traditional **liturgy** (order of public worship), properly ordained clergy, and use of sacred rituals or sacraments. The nonliturgical denominations emphasize a free and spontaneous approach to prayer, reading the Bible, testifying to faith, and exhorting others in worship together. Liturgical denominations include the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran churches; nonliturgical groups would be Baptists, Quakers, and the variety of free evangelical churches. Somewhere in between are such groups as the Methodists, the United Church of Christ, and the Calvinist (Presbyterian, Reformed) churches, which appreciate the traditional liturgies but use them more freely. Of course, there is variety even within one denomination, between those which are "high church" (more liturgical emphasis) and those which are "low."

In recent times, the so-called liturgical renewal has affected most church groups, bringing a higher appreciation of the traditional forms of worship even in the nonliturgical churches. In the following description we look in a general way at the broadly based, traditional practice of Christian worship, noting significant variances where appropriate. It should also be said, of course, that many modern Christians, just like many modernists of other religions, participate only marginally in the sacred rituals of the church, though they still consider themselves Christian and live generally in keeping with Christian morality.

Sunday Worship Just as Jews consider the Sabbath the heart and soul of Judaism, so also Christians observe the central practice of communal worship each week, the day being Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection. Worship takes place on other days, too, but the Sunday worship service is the most distinctive Christian sacred time. The service itself developed from the Jewish synagogue service of praise, prayer, scripture readings, and exposition of scripture. To this service focused on God's word, the early Christians added the liturgy of the Eucharist (Thanksgiving), that is, the celebration of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ. Thus, the complete Sunday worship service in many liturgical churches consists of two parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, although some may at times use only one part.

Often an Entrance Rite begins the service, with a call to worship, communal confession of sins, hymns, and prayers. The Liturgy of the Word includes readings of the scriptures: Old Testament, Gospels, and Epistles. A minister expounds the scripture in a sermon or homily, and the people respond with hymns, psalms, and the saying of the creed. They offer common prayer for all Christians and for all people according to their need. The Liturgy of the Eucharist may begin with the people greeting one another with peace and bringing offerings to God, including the bread and wine to be used in the Eucharist. There follows the Great Thanksgiving prayer narrating Christ's institution of the sacred meal, asking for the Holy Spirit, and establishing unity with all Christians everywhere. After the bread is symbolically broken, the people commune with Christ and with each other by eating and drinking the bread and wine, believing that in this ritual Christ is present among them. At the conclusion of the service, the minister blesses the people and may say, "Go in peace, serve the Lord," an indication that the people carry the renewed spiritual blessings into their daily life. Nonliturgical churches, of course, have many variations of the Sunday worship service, with more emphasis on reading the Bible, preaching, songs, and prayer.

The Sacraments The Eucharist is considered by many Christians to be a **sacrament**, that is, a sacred ritual through which God's saving power comes to the believers. Most Christian denominations perform some sacraments, although they do not all use that term or agree on what it means. Some of the ceremonies were mentioned or authorized in the New Testament, and others were added. Ceremonies called sacraments include baptism, the Eucharist (Lord's Supper), confession and forgiveness, anointing the sick, **confirmation** of the baptized, ordination of clergy, and the rite of marriage. Roman Catholics and some Anglicans refer to all seven of these ceremonies as sacraments; Lutherans and some Reformed traditions retain most of these ceremonies but reserve the term *sacrament* for baptism, the Eucharist, and (sometimes) confession and forgiveness. Other denominations avoid sacramental language altogether, although virtually all Christian groups practice baptism. The important symbolism of the sacraments is that God's power and presence are connected with ordinary human activities like washing, eating, drinking, and so forth. Participating in the sacrament, people dedicate their total being to God and receive divine forgiveness and power, thus sanctifying all of life.

The Eucharist (also called the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Mass, or the Divine Liturgy) has been the central sacrament of the Sunday service from the beginning, although Christians have not been unified in interpreting its meaning. One long-standing view, traditionally accepted by Roman Catholics, is the doctrine of "transubstantiation," a miraculous change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. In the Reformation, thinkers like Luther reacted against the idea that each mass was a new sacrifice of Christ, holding rather that Christ was "truly present" in, with, and under the bread and wine. More radical reformers like Zwingli held that the bread and wine only symbolize the body and blood of Christ. These basic interpretations are still held in the Christian denominations of today, so that the Christian church experiences division precisely in this sacrament of unity. Ecumenical discussions today are attempting to reach some kind of consensus or at least better mutual understanding of the alternative positions on the meaning of the Eucharist.

Festivals and Holy Days

Christians, like people of other religions, celebrate sacred times throughout the cycle of the year. Most Christians agree in setting aside as sacred time the spring celebration of Christ's death and resurrection on Good Friday and

Easter, the winter celebration of his birth at Christmas, and also the coming of the Spirit and the beginning of the church on Pentecost. Many churches expand these with times of preparation and extended celebration, and many additional holy days are observed throughout the year.

Lent and Easter The most obvious holy season from the very beginning was the Paschal (Passover) season when Christ's death and resurrection occurred. Eventually this Paschal season was extended by celebrating the events of Holy Week: Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the entombment—all leading up to the climactic event of the Resurrection. In further developments, the preparation for remembering Christ's death began six weeks earlier with the Lenten season, and the Easter celebration itself extended six weeks after Easter.

Starting from Ash Wednesday, when traditional Christians put ashes on their foreheads, the season of **Lent** is devoted to special disciplines of prayer, repentance, fasting, or voluntarily giving up certain pleasures. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, remembering the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of Jesus' passion week. Maundy Thursday celebrates Christ's last supper with his disciples when he used the bread and the wine of the Passover meal to institute the Lord's Supper. Good Friday is an especially solemn day for Christians, remembering Christ's three hours of agony on the cross and his death and entombment. Saturday night may be given over to a service of vigil. And early Sunday morning, with the rising of the sun, Christians begin to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in a joyous festival service. Such an Easter service may have a colorful procession of clergy and people, trumpets sounding, and choir singing. People greet one another, "Today Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This joyous mood continues for the next six weeks, including the celebration of Christ's ascension into heaven forty days later on Ascension Day.

Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany **Christmas**, the **Feast of the Nativity**, began to be observed widely in Christian churches about the fourth century, when December 25 was set in the Western churches. Of course, the actual time of year when Jesus was born is not known. Some Eastern churches still follow the ancient practice of celebrating the Nativity on January 6. Many Christians observe the season of **Advent** for four weeks before Christmas and the season of **Epiphany** for some weeks after Christmas. This is the time of the celebration of God's love in the incarnation of Christ.

Advent is the beginning of the Christian year, commencing also the half-year cycle in which events from Christ's life are celebrated. Advent is a season of preparation, and the worship services bring Christians back to Old Testament times, hearing the voices of the prophets, preparing their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Some Christians place an Advent wreath with four candles in their homes, lighting one additional candle each week in preparation for the nativity of Christ.

Christmas is a highly joyous festival, with songs, plays, nativity scenes, and other rituals celebrating God's great love in becoming one with humanity as a baby born in a manger. It is a time especially dear to children, who are given special roles in telling of the Christ child. Symbolic of God's great gift is the tradition of exchanging gifts and greeting cards at Christmastime, and decorating an evergreen tree with lights symbolizes Christ's light shining in the darkness of this world.

The Feast of the Epiphany (showing forth) comes on January 6. This feast originated in the East as a commemoration of Christ's birth and baptism, and still today the Eastern churches have a ritual of blessing the baptismal waters. In the Western churches, Epiphany has become associated with the story of the wise men from the East coming to Bethlehem to present gifts to the newborn King.

Pentecost and the Season of the Church Pentecost, some fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, is the celebration of the outpouring of the Spirit on Christ's disciples after his ascension into heaven. Its roots lie in the Jewish festival of Shavuot, the celebration of the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. In the Christian view, instead of the Torah, God gave the Spirit to give guidance to the church, so Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit, is also the birthday of the church.

Beginning with Pentecost, the next half year is considered the season of the church, since it contains no major festivals from Christ's life. Feast days in this period observed by many Christians are All Saints' Day on November 1, set aside to commemorate the saints and heroes of the faith, and All Souls' Day (Commemoration of the Faithful

Departed) on November 2, remembering all those who have kept the faith and gone on to their reward. In the more liturgical churches, holy days in honor of the apostles and saints are scattered throughout the whole year—devoted, for example, to St. Luke the Evangelist, St. Peter and St. Paul the Apostles, St. Michael and All Angels, St. Mary Mother of Our Lord, and many, many more.

Worship in Daily Life

How does one sanctify daily life? Christians, like Jews and Muslims, find the practice of daily prayer and study of the scriptures to be important in keeping a close relationship with God in ordinary life. And there are Christian rituals surrounding the main events and passages of life.

Prayer and Meditation The early Christians took over from Judaism the practice of daily prayers at certain times of the day. The apostles prayed at the third, sixth, and ninth hours (9 A.M., 12 noon, and 3 P.M.). Later the tradition of daily prayers developed into a cycle of public worship throughout the day, the "Daily Office," followed especially in the monastic setting, with laypeople also attending. Prime, mattins, lauds, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline are names that have been used for these short services throughout the day, which included psalms, hymns, scripture readings, and prayers. The churches of the Reformation simplified these services. Some churches abolished the daily office in favor of more informal devotions, whereas the Lutherans and Anglicans retained at least mattins (morning prayer) and vespers (evensong).

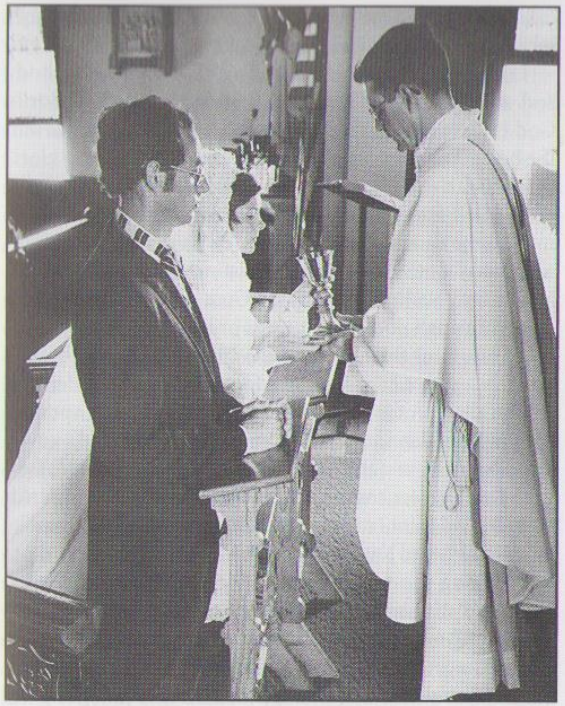
Apart from these daily services, which are little observed in modern hectic life, many Christian families have a time set aside daily, usually in the evening, for scripture reading and prayer. Groups may meet together occasionally for Bible study. Some Christians make the sign of the cross on themselves with a brief prayer upon rising in the morning and going to bed at night. Prayers of thanksgiving at mealtime are customary, but there are no prescribed dietary laws to follow as in Judaism. In times of sickness there is intercession to God and perhaps a pastoral visit from a congregational leader who prays with the sick. In some denominations Christians periodically confess their daily sins to a priest and receive forgiveness—confession (or penance) is one of the sacraments in some of the liturgical churches.

Rituals of the Passages of Life Whereas some Christians have taken over from the Jews the practice of circumcision of newborn male children, this does not have any special religious significance. The universally practiced rite of initiation into the Christian community is baptism, for male and female alike, and for most Christian denominations this occurs shortly after birth. Some Protestant denominations, especially those in the Baptist tradition, reserve baptism until the child is old enough to understand the meaning of this ritual. Baptism uses the universal water symbolism of cleansing and purifying. Most Christians believe the child is born with sin, like all humans, and the ritual of baptism signifies the washing away of sin through Christ's merit. The child is said to be "born again," having participated in the death and resurrection of Christ. Now the child is united with Christ and with Christ's body, the church, for the rest of life.

The ritual of washing in baptism may be done by complete immersion in water—a vivid experience of death and resurrection preferred by groups that practice adult baptism only—or by a symbolic washing with a small amount of water, the general custom for infant baptism. The baptizer reads about baptism from the New Testament and asks the child to profess the faith and vow to be faithful to Christ. In the case of infants, family and friends (godparents) speak on behalf of the infant, underscoring the communal character of this ritual. Administering the washing with water, the baptizer says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Some churches follow the early Christian practice of anointing with oil, and in the Eastern Orthodox churches the infant receives Holy Communion as a full member of the church.

The Western churches that baptize infants have established the practice of confirmation for both boys and girls, at an age roughly corresponding to puberty. This ritual, a sacrament in some churches, is seen as a confirmation of the vows that were made at baptism and an entrance into full membership in the church. It is, thus, a kind of passage to adulthood in the religious community. Confirmation is performed in a group before the congregation. The bishop or minister may lay hands on the head of each candidate or give the right hand of fellowship to symbolize full incorporation into the church. Confirmation, like bar mitzvah, is a time for family and friends to celebrate the new spiritual status of the youth.

Some Christian churches see marriage as a sacrament, but virtually all groups provide a ritual to accompany this



A Roman Catholic nuptial mass, with the bride and groom receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist.

important passage of life. In the history of Christianity there has been some feeling that marriage is not as high a spiritual state as celibacy. But Christians are unanimous in considering marriage a great blessing from God, resulting in the family as the heart of the human community and the church. Marriage is considered a lifelong commitment of faithfulness to one's spouse, intended so by God.

The wedding ritual differs widely in the various churches. Usually performed in a church sanctuary, it is always a festive occasion for family and community. A traditional form of the ritual, followed by many (with modernizations), is that of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. After scripture readings, songs, and prayer, the priest asks each,

> Wilt thou have this woman [man] to thy wedded wife [husband], to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

Answering, "I will," both now give their troth to each other, holding their right hands together:

> I, _____, take thee, _____, to my wedded wife [husband], to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish [and to obey], till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

Finally the minister says,

> Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

These pledges and vows of lifelong faithfulness and love are considered the heart of the wedding ritual. Many local customs attend the celebration, such as throwing rice on the newlyweds, giving gifts, and a joyous party in honor of the new family.

Death is considered by Christians a passage to the life promised and won by Christ, so death rituals combine the sense of loss and sadness with the mood of joy and confidence. The reality of the saints—the faithful who have gone before—has always been strong in the Christian tradition, and a funeral is a time to commend the departed one to the company of saints awaiting the resurrection and eternal life in heaven. A funeral is a time to reflect on the brevity of life and the destiny that awaits all. It is a time to renew hope and confidence in God's mercy and promises. Johannes Brahms's musical composition *A German Requiem* combines these two moods in a sublime way: There is the funeral march with its driving drumbeat to the text, "All flesh is grass"; and there is the moving chorale portrait of the heavenly dwelling place.

Like weddings, death rituals differ widely among various groups of Christians. For some, the sacrament of extreme unction—anointing the dying person with oil—is practiced; for others, prayer accompanies the passage into death. The church bell tolls mournfully, informing the congregation of the death. Chosen mourners carry the body in a casket into the church for a service of scripture reading and prayer. The procession then goes to the church cemetery, where the body is

placed in the grave in the earth. Throwing earth upon the casket, the priest may say,

> Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother [sister] here departed: we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.
>
> *(Book of Common Prayer)*

Whereas no specific periods of mourning are followed, most Christians remember the dead in various ways, such as lighting a candle or saying prayers on their behalf.

Healing and Medicine Among Christians

According to the Gospel narratives, Jesus was a charismatic healer who had compassion on scores of sick people who came to him, healing them by the power of God. Some he healed by touch or letting them touch his garments, others by powerful words of healing, one by applying his own saliva to the diseased eyes. In the context of healing, he often talked about the person's faith, or the faith of another person who presented the sick person. And he often linked physical healing with spiritual healing by pronouncing the forgiveness of sins.

Thus, Jesus provided a model for compassion and healing that has been very influential for Christians ever since. Jesus specifically charged his followers with caring for the sick unselfishly and without condition. For example, when Jesus taught that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, a lawyer asked, "And who is my neighbor?" In answer, Jesus told a story of a Jew battered and left naked and half dead by thieves, lying by the roadside. A priest passed by ignoring him, as well as a Levite. But a Samaritan (considered unclean by Jews) had compassion, cleansed his wounds with wine, bandaged him, brought him to an inn where he cared for him, and when he had to leave he paid the innkeeper to take care of him until he returned. Jesus ended with a decisive challenge: "You go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25–36). And in a parable about people standing before the King on judgment day, Jesus made it clear that when people provide for the needy and take care of the sick, it is as if they are doing it for the Lord himself (Matthew 25:30–46). And so Christians have always felt that central to their faith is the calling to serve God by caring for the needy in all ways, including healing and caring for them.

Like Jews, Christians believe that God created the body and still preserves it and that, therefore, we are to glorify God by keeping our body pure and healthful. St. Paul said the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are to glorify God with our body. Like Jews, again, Christians have diverse ideas about the origin of disease and sickness—sin may be the cause, or punishment, or an evil spirit, or sickness may come from God for testing or teaching us. All health and healing come from God, whether that power comes through doctors or priests or healers or prayer.

Throughout the history of the Christian church, healing activities centered around three foci: charismatic healers, sacred healing centers, and healing rituals. The early apostles, such as Peter, John, and Paul, often called down God's power to heal people, and this tradition of holy people able to heal with God's power continued through people such as Martin of Tours and Saint Francis to modern-day representatives like Oral Roberts and Kathryn Kuhlman. From early times on, sacred healing shrines throughout the Christian world, often associated with saints and their relics, have been visited by untold millions of pilgrims seeking healing from specific diseases. The most famous of these is Lourdes in southern France, founded because of apparitions of the Virgin Mary that appeared there; millions of pilgrims and volunteer helpers go there every year seeking healing and spiritual refreshment. Healing rituals are described already in the New Testament: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:14–16). Still today, Christians use prayers, rituals, and sacraments for the purpose of healing the sick.

Most Christians in the world today believe that modern medicine, with doctors, nurses, hospitals, drugs, and all the rest, are avenues of God's healing power in the world. Yet the diversity represented by thousands of denominations of the Christian church makes it difficult to generalize. Some Christian groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists, place restrictions on the practice of modern medicine, such as refusing blood transfusions. Even among mainstream Christian denominations there is some divergence in attitudes toward modern medical practices. For example, the Roman Catholic Church has taken strong stands against medical procedures involving birth

control, whereas leaders of other denominations have advocated such medical family planning measures as crucial for the health and welfare of communities throughout the world. Some stand strongly against the medical practice of abortion, while others, often within the same denominations, strongly support women's access to medical abortion. New medical technologies involving stem cell research have been greeted with strong rejection or equally strong advocacy from the different Christian groups.

Christians today are realizing that the achievements of modern medical science, important as God's gift to the world today, cannot be the final word in healing. What is crucial for *healing* is a theological framework in which illness and healing can be understood. Healing comes principally from seeing what one's illness means, how it fits into the larger pattern of one's life, and how sickness and even death are part of one's life story with God. With this understanding, Christian communities today find new meaning in prayer for healing, sacraments of anointing the sick, penance, the Eucharist, laying on of hands, and other traditional rituals. There is an emphasis on inner healing as well, coming through continued spiritual growth, opportunities to narrate one's traumatic life leading to forgiveness of those who abused, a sense of illness as a journey that can bring renewal and transformation, and seeing death itself in a larger framework of meaning.

Art in Christian Worship and Ritual

Fundamental to Christian teaching, in contrast to Judaism and Islam, is the incarnation: God became human; the divine is manifested within the created world. Thus, the Christian aesthetic sense has generally encouraged full use of all the arts in the worship of God: sculpture and painting, architecture, music, literature, poetry, drama, and dance.

It is true that Christians inherited the Jewish aesthetic sense, including the prohibition of images, and for the first centuries Christians continued the Jewish emphasis on the word rather than on pictorial art. As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, however, the tradition of representational art developed, especially for portraying Jesus and the saints. Christian iconography was preoccupied with the person and role of Jesus and his followers, portraying Jesus both as the earthly founder of the church and as the heavenly savior. Many symbolic expressions developed, such as portraying Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In the different cultural areas and times, portrayals of Jesus and the saints have taken many different styles. Whereas in the early centuries the crucifixion scene seems to have been avoided, later this became a central theme of Christian art, presenting both the victorious Christ on the cross and, especially in the medieval period, the suffering savior.

In the eighth century there was a serious controversy regarding the use of icons—flat, two-dimensional paintings of the saints. Some felt these icons were receiving too much worship and miraculous powers were being attributed to them. But a theology of icons developed and won the day: Since Christ consented to become a man, theologians argued, it is permissible to portray Christ in visible human form. Artists in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance created countless paintings and sculptures with Christian themes, some to be used on altars in churches. In keeping with the medieval trend toward devotionalism, painting expressed warm, loving attitudes toward Christ and the saints. In the Renaissance period, monumental and vigorous expressions of humanity's relationship to God were painted. For example, Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel focus on God reaching forth the gift of life to Adam; Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* shows Christ as master surrounded by his disciples, portrayed as real human personalities.

But in Reformation times an iconoclastic movement developed among the more radical reformers, who reacted against "papist" imagery and ritual, destroying iconographic imagery and liturgical furnishing. They established the tradition in Reformed and Baptist churches of little art, ornamentation, and liturgy. The liturgical churches have continued the tradition of using all the arts, with color, ornamentation, paintings, statues, poetic liturgies, music, and the like.

Religious drama in the Christian tradition grew from the liturgical mass, which itself was presented as a kind of historical drama. Important for the education and edification of the common people were the mystery and morality plays put on in the Middle Ages. The literary arts in general flourished in Christian circles, based on the biblical narratives and poetry as the great spiritual source and literary model. Widely influential has been *The Divine Comedy* by Dante (1265–1321), in which Dante guides the reader through Hell, Purgatory, the earthly paradise, the Limbo of good pagans, and finally Heaven. Later the epic *Paradise Lost* by Milton (1608–1674) presents the Christian universe in Puritan tones. Writers like William Blake, W. H. Auden, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Emily Dickinson, Flannery O'Connor,

and many more, in poetry, novels, and dramas, have given artistic expression to Christian themes, ideas, and values.

The art of music has always played a great role in most parts of the Christian church. Medieval plainsong chants developed into Renaissance polyphonic masses in the hands of composers like Palestrina and Gabrieli. In the baroque era came the great oratorios and chorales of composers like Handel, J. S. Bach, and many others. Musical expressions have continued in Christian communities with great variety up to the modern-day folk masses and various musical forms in the different non-Western cultures. Christian musical artists have excelled in cultivating the possibilities of music as artistic expression of Christian theology and inspiration for faith and life.

Christian architecture, influenced by the synagogue, started with house churches and developed into the basilica, a structure that set aside sacred space with the altar, the symbol of Christ, as the center of action. In the medieval period, cathedrals developed where bishops presided with many priests and monks. There would be rood screens fencing off the area for the monks to chant the daily offices, together with many altars for celebrating daily masses. Particularly expressive of Christian medieval ideas is the Gothic cathedral, soaring to heaven but planted on earth. With its ribbed vaulting, pointed arches, and flying buttresses, the Gothic cathedral gives a strong sense of lightness and soaring spaces; the overall effect is to express verticality with a sense of heavenward movement. The baroque cathedral became a kind of divine theater, with a light and airy quality, giving the worshipers a sense of being in contact with heaven above. Eastern Orthodox Christians have favored the dome as a representation of heaven, with space radiating downward to the earth, giving architectural expression to the incarnation.

In the Protestant Reformation, the reformers destroyed the rood screens and brought the pulpit to the center, or they put the pulpit, altar, and baptismal font together at the east end, creating space in which all worshipers present could hear and see all that goes on, focused on the word of God.

THE LIFE OF LOVE: SOCIETY AND ETHICS

How should we live? To be a Christian means to live as befits a member of the Christian church, the new "people of God" gathered around the worship of Jesus Christ, living the life of love as Jesus lived.

The Society of the Church

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, from the word meaning "called out." The church is made up of the people "called out" by the Spirit of God to form the new people of God in fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Christians think of the church as the continuation of the chosen people of God, gathered around the Christ who is the fulfillment of God's whole design. Peter uses many Old Testament images of the people of Israel to describe this new people of God:

> For you are a chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people of God's possession, that you should proclaim the triumphs of the one who has called you out of darkness into his wondrous light. Once you were no people, but you are now the people of God. You were outside his mercy once, but now you have received his mercy.
>
> (I Peter 2:9–10)

According to the Christian perspective, once the people of God were the Jewish people with whom God covenanted, and the gentiles were on the outside. But now in Christ gentiles are also made a part of God's family, the church.

Who Makes Up the Church? The church is not like other voluntary human societies that people choose to join or not to join. It is not a club or interest group. The church exists wherever there are believers in Christ who share their commitment to Christ and live Christian lives. Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). That means that the church is constituted by the worship of Christ.

How does one become a part of this new people of God? One does not become a Christian by birth. Rather, one chooses to belong by believing and being baptized. Of course, being born into a Christian family is an important way in which the family of God continues. Most Christians practice infant baptism as a sign that children as well as the rest of the family share in the family of God. A significant number of Christians prefer to wait until the children are old enough to choose for themselves to be baptized. In either case, the emphasis is on faith and choice. A person baptized as an infant chooses to remain in that baptismal identity. He or she is instructed and guided in faith and life and typically reaffirms the baptismal identity in the ritual of confirmation

when grown up. An adult who has not been a part of the church may come to believe in Christ, and the profession of faith and reception of baptism testify that he or she has been called by the Spirit to be part of the new people of God.

Churches, Congregations, Ministry The Catholic (universal) Church, like Christ, is incarnated; it is embodied in concrete form in Christian communities or "churches" everywhere on earth. Although there were periods in earlier church history when many Christians were under one ecclesiastical structure, in modern times there are numerous world churches, state churches, denominations, and sects that make up the body of Christ. The body of Christ, Christians believe, must be present in concrete form within the diverse cultures and ethnic groups of the world. In this real, living church of Christ, there sometimes appears to be little unity, and many Christians are troubled by these divisions. One of the most significant developments today is the ecumenical movement, in which Christians are trying to make real the unity of the whole *oikumene* (world) of diverse Christian communities.

On the local level, Christians typically gather together into communities called congregations, centering usually in a church building in which the believers assemble for worship on Sundays and other important times. Congregations in turn are usually associated together in larger structures, whether that is a worldwide organization like the Roman Catholic Church, a state organization like the Anglican Church of England, a denomination like the Methodist Church in the United States, or the like. For all the trauma caused by competing associations of Christians, the various churches and denominations of the world do represent the concrete, human embodiment of the universal church, the body of Christ.

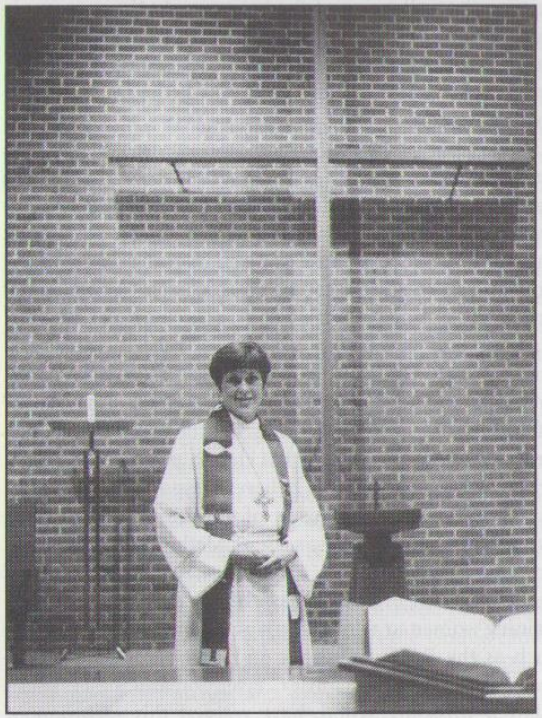
Christians as Christ's presence in the world share in common the responsibility for the ministry of the gospel and the worship of God. In order to provide for the ongoing function of the ministry of preaching the word and celebrating the rituals, most Christians believe that Christ instituted a "ministry" within the church to guide and carry out this work for the benefit of all. In the early Christian church, a three-part ministry developed. A bishop was appointed for each Christian community, having responsibility for the ministry of worship and for serving the well-being of the believers. As the communities grew, the responsibility for worship was entrusted to presbyters (elders or priests) and the responsibility for service and caring for the family of believers was given over to deacons.

Today the various Christian communities have many versions of this ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, ordained to lead and guide the family of believers in their worship of Christ and their ministry to the world. One of the stumbling blocks to the unification of the church is the great variety of understandings and practices related to the ordained ministry. Some churches, like the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches, have hierarchically structured church leadership, starting with the pope or the archbishop of Canterbury and moving down to the levels of parish priests. Other churches, like the Southern Baptists or the Quakers, operate with a church polity from below, with each congregation of believers responsible for designating leaders in the ministry of the church. Many of the Protestant church bodies, such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Reformed churches, Lutherans, Anglicans, and the United Church of Christ, have begun the practice of ordaining women to all the offices of the ministry. But others, such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, as well as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, have resisted this inclusion of women within the ordained ministry.

Women in Religious Leadership That disagreement among denominations today about ordaining women to full ministry reflects the overall checkered history of women in Christianity. The traditional Christian views about the role of women have been strongly influenced first of all by Jewish culture (there were no women among Jesus' twelve disciples). Extremely influential has been the interpretation of the creation and fall story in I Timothy 2:11–14 (probably written by a disciple of Paul):

> A woman should learn in silence with due submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over men; she should keep silent. For Adam was created first, then Eve; and it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman who, being led into deception, became a transgressor.

The arguments here—that the man was created first in the order of creation and should, therefore, be dominant, that the woman was the one who first fell into sin, and the



Many Protestant denominations ordain women as ministers. (Courtesy of Pastor Jean Holmes at Nauraushaun Presbyterian Church, Pearl River, NY)

conclusion that women should not teach men but should remain silent in the church—have characterized the view of women in the Christian church up to modern times. The patriarchal structure of the early Christian society is seen in the judgment of early theologians that flesh and desire were especially associated with women's sensuality, leading to the view that virginity and celibacy are superior to married life. Women were often described in despicable terms as temptresses, the "gateway of the devil," storehouses of filth and evil.

Like men, women too consecrated themselves to God by entering the monastic life, but even there they were under the rule of men—the male members of the order, the local bishop, the patriarch or pope. Throughout the medieval period, most women in Christian communities had few rights, found their role only in the home, and received no formal education. There were strong women—probably more than we know—who broke out of these restraints, but such women could be stigmatized and even burned as witches. Influenced by the church's theology about women, Western societies, even those developing modern democratic or representational governments (e.g., the U.S. Constitution, the French Declaration of Human Rights), still subordinated women to men. Suffrage for women in Christian churches and in Christian nations is a very recent development.

Yet feminist biblical scholars and theologians today (both women and men) have recovered many positive images of women already in the scriptures. The creation story in Genesis actually reflects a mutuality and equality of men and women, many scholars have pointed out. God created humans in God's own image, "male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27). Jesus showed a high positive regard for women and for their abilities and religious capacities. He had warm relations with women such as Mary and Martha, and he assumed that women—even those with reputations as prostitutes—could learn and, thus, be among his disciples (see, for example, John 11:5 ff.; Luke 7:37–50). And Paul's pronouncement of equality is powerful: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeperson, there is neither male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Many women were active in leadership roles in the early church. For example, Priscilla is frequently mentioned as equally active with her husband Aquila in missionary travels, in teaching the way of God, even in "risking their necks" for Paul's life (Acts 18:1–3, 18, 26; Romans 16:3). Monica, mother of St. Augustine, was known widely not only for her piety and prayers but also for her wisdom and mystical experiences. In fact, a great many women in the medieval period became renowned for their wisdom, their mystical experiences, and their activities to help the poor and suffering—earlier we noted Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila.

Drawing on images and models such as these, today there are many strong, capable Christian women as leaders, ministers, theologians, and even bishops in some church bodies. Feminist theologians emphasize not only women's equality in value and competency with men, but they also explore women's ways of knowing and experiencing as a resource in the ongoing need to rethink and reconstruct theology to meet the needs of Christians in the world today.[1] Thus, more emphasis is given to the feminine qual-

ities of God, to inclusive language in worship, and to metaphors and practices that emphasize mutuality, personhood, and community rather than conflict, hierarchy, and individuality. "Feminist theology" remains controversial in some Christian circles, but to many Christians it is bringing dramatic new breakthroughs in understanding the Christian gospel for these times.

Sanctification of Life in Ethics

How should we live? Christians, like Jews and Muslims, believe that all of life should be worship of God, whether these are acts of love for God expressed in ritual and prayer or acts of love toward others. In understanding how to live the life of love, Christians look to the Ten Commandments and especially to Jesus' new commandment of love. However, Christians do not live the ethical life because it is "commanded." Rather, it is because of love and gratitude to God. Faith and the experience of forgiveness create a new being in place of the old. The new person lives in union with Christ. "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me," Paul said (Galatians 2:20). Since the springs of motivation are touched by Christ, ethical behavior is not so much a discipline leading to transformation as an expression of transformation.

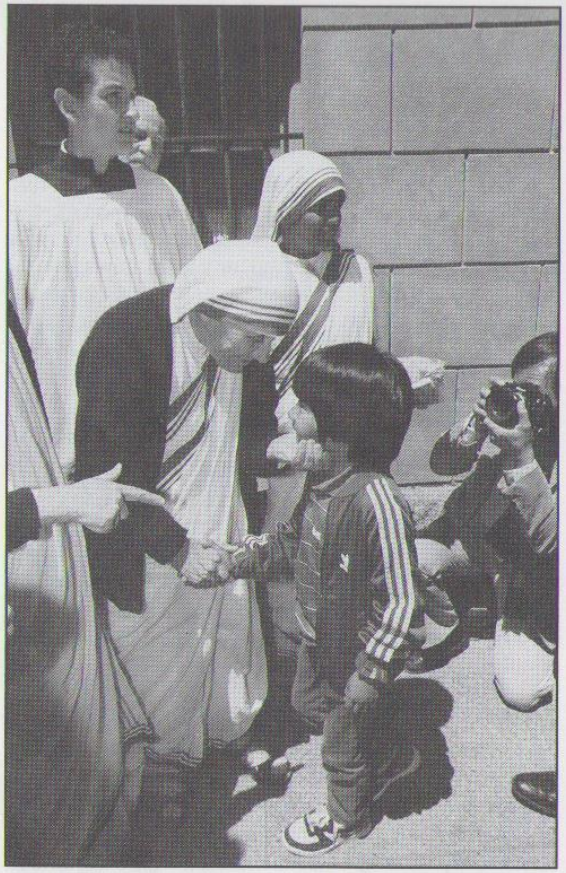
Love Fulfilling Law in Liberty From earliest times in the Christian tradition there has been considerable thinking about the basis of ethical actions. Certainly the early Christians agreed that the heart of Jesus' ethical teaching was love. But how does one put that love into action? The discussion was at first (and still is, for that matter) couched in terms of law versus liberty. Should we do the right, loving things in life because it is God's will (law)? Or, as forgiven and restored children of God, are we free to do what we ourselves find to be best and most loving (liberty)?

Since the first Christians were Jews, it was natural that they held the Jewish Torah in high esteem as the great gift of God. So, as they sought guidance in how to love God and their neighbors, they turned to the commandments given by God. Surely the Torah would provide the best definition of God's will of love, for God is the supreme evaluator of good and evil. Following God's law without question is the sure guide to the loving ethical life, without falling into rationalized, self-serving decisions about how to act.

Whereas this legalistic approach to ethics has much merit in terms of order and confidence, there are drawbacks, as Christians discovered. As new situations arise, it is not always clear what the law would have one do, especially since Christians look to the New Testament more directly than to the Old Testament for ethical guidance. Often a person has either to rely on the authority of the church to tell what one should do or to resort to arbitrary interpretations of the law. God's law prohibits all killing, but what about state-ordered killing (war or capital punishment)? Are women permitted to be priests and ministers or not? What about abortion? Christians disagree on what God's law actually says about such matters. But the biggest weakness in the legalistic approach is the feeling that, once one has done what the law stipulates, he or she has fulfilled God's will of love. We keep the Ten Commandments—so why should we worry about housing discrimination or people starving?

In counteracting notions of Jewish Christians about the necessity for Christians to keep the Torah, Paul placed a great stress on freedom: "Christ has freed us for freedom; stand firm, then, and do not again submit to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Paul was concerned first of all about faith rather than works of the law as the basis for salvation. But Christians have applied this "freedom" approach to the ethics of love also. Christ has abolished the law. Love cannot be coerced, love must be freely given. Since we have been redeemed and made new creatures, with Christ living in us, we should rely on that motivation to love freely and truly. Those who stress the freedom of love often quote Augustine's famous saying, "Love, and do what you will." If one truly loves God, one's love will always find the best way to act toward others also. "Let love's root be within you, and from that root nothing but good can spring," explains Augustine (*Tractatus in Epistolam Johannis Decem*).

This "freedom" ethical approach brings out important dimensions of Christian love, especially in contrast to the legalistic approach. But there are serious drawbacks here as well. In some early Christian congregations there arose "antinomians" (people against the law) who taught that, since Christ has abolished the law, Christians are free to do whatever they please. Some held that Christians have been perfected by Christ and, thus, can do no wrong; others held that, since God forgives all sins through Christ, it doesn't matter that one sins. In either view, freedom is the



Mother Teresa, champion of the poor in India and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, talks with a small boy after church services in San Francisco.

style and law is out as a guide to love. But it quickly became clear to Paul—as it has been to Christians ever since—that total liberty as a moral principle easily degenerates into selfish license and some very unloving behavior toward others.

Paul said there is "a more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31), the way of love as a transformation of both law and liberty. "Indeed, love is the fulfilling of the law," Paul wrote (Romans 13:10), showing that God's will as revealed in the law is brought to fulfillment through the practice of love. The law of God is not just a written code, to be fulfilled by slavish adherence to all its details. It is a revelation of God's fundamental intention for humans. Paul wrote, "All the law is fulfilled in one word, in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). This means freedom from the literal form of the law, but not freedom to do whatever one pleases. People need God's will for guidance—with the understanding that loving and caring for the neighbor is what God's will is all about. As to who the neighbor is, Jesus himself had much to say on that, identifying the neighbor as anyone in need: the sick, prisoners, those hungry and thirsty, strangers, and orphans. Whatever we do in caring for the least of these our brethren, Jesus tells us, we do for him (Matthew 25:40).

So law is transformed by love in freedom, and freedom is transformed by love in God's will (law) of caring for the neighbor. With the Corinthian congregation, Paul took up a specific question of Christian freedom, namely, whether it is lawful for Christians to eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. His answer sums up the relation between law, liberty, and love: "All things are allowed, but not all things are beneficial. All things are allowed, but not all things build others up. No one should seek his own good but that of the other" (I Corinthians 10:23–24). On the one hand, Christians are free to follow their own consciences; on the other hand, the welfare of their neighbors is dear to God. Christian love is the way to bring both together in an ethical Christian life.

One more word from Paul: "For you, brethren, were called to freedom; only do not use your freedom as an occasion for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (Galatians 5:13). In love Christians are truly free and truly servants. How can one be free and slave at the same time? It is through love. Of course, there are different kinds of love. What is meant here is God's kind of love shown in Christ, that is, *agape*, which is unconditional, nondiscriminatory, self-giving love. Other kinds of love—important for full human life—are based on mutual friendship (*philia*) or passionate attraction (*eros*). But agape is love with no strings attached, based in God's grace for all. Friendship and passionate love certainly have their place in Christian ethics, but it is in showing God's kind of love, agape, that Christians can both be free and be servants of all.

Justice and Mercy Toward One's Neighbor The ethic of love is not just a theory but also a matter of practical action. How do I love my neighbor as myself? Does loving

mean never punishing but always forgiving? In this imperfect world with evils in every choice, don't we always wind up doing some harm as we try to do the good? Questions like these abound as Christians attempt to live real life in love. From the many commandments in the Torah, Christians have singled out especially the so-called "Ten Commandments" as an indication of how love works in action. Interpreting the Ten Commandments through the perspective of the New Testament, Christians see that these commandments provide the ideal combination of both God's justice and God's mercy. There must be justice in order for all God's creatures to live with integrity and value; there must be mercy in order that the failures of our human freedom might be transformed.

Taken from Exodus 20, in the traditional numbering used in some Christian churches (e.g., in the *Book of Common Prayer*), these are the Ten Commandments:

1 You shall have no other gods before me.

2 You shall not make for yourselves any graven image.

3 You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

4 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

5 Honor your father and your mother.

6 You shall not kill.

7 You shall not commit adultery.

8 You shall not steal.

9 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is his.

These Ten Commandments may be divided into two "tables": the first four have to do primarily with loving God, and the last six have to do with loving one's neighbor. But, as has often been pointed out, keeping the first four requires loving one's neighbor—for we live in human communities, not as solitary individuals. And, of course, keeping the last six requires loving God. Another important aspect of these Ten Commandments is that each has a positive as well as negative quality. To have God alone as the center and source of life (first commandment) means to treat all other people as creatures loved by God. Not to steal and not to kill require promoting the just wealth and the well-being of others. In this way the Ten Commandments become for Christians not just a law code but also a basic guide to the freedom and service of Christian love.

In practice Christians do not always agree about personal ethical decisions. Christian love does not translate directly and unequivocally into positions on abortion, taxes, homosexuality, warfare, or capitalism, and faithful Christians often disagree on such questions. But some traditional Christian ethical positions might be briefly sketched out.

Christians have always viewed marriage—and, thus, human sexuality—as one of God's great gifts, and some Christians even consider marriage a sacrament. There has been a certain tendency to view sexual passion itself as tainted by the fall into sin and, thus, arose the Christian tradition of celibacy as a higher spiritual life. Most Christians feel, however, that sex within marriage is a healthful, positive human activity. It provides for procreation and, thus, creates the family, and it gives love and companionship. Some churches, it is true, have held that the only purpose of sex in marriage is for procreation.

One thing the great majority of Christians agree on is that marriage should be monogamous: God intends one woman and one man to be wed for life as the best way of fulfilling the divine loving design. As for the other questions, in modern times there tends to be a general division between "liberal" and "conservative" positions on questions of marital and sexual ethics. Such a division often exists even within the same denomination. One position would hold that premarital sex, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality, for example, are always absolutely wrong. The other position would find the same situations to be wrong or right depending on whether caring love is expressed within them.

Christians agree on the value and dignity of human life, labor, and happiness. Therefore, private property and freedom to accumulate wealth and possessions have generally been supported by Christians. There is a certain suspicion about unbridled human greed and a concern to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for the downtrodden in the face of human selfish competition. Some have gone to vows of poverty; others have advocated a kind of socialism as the ideal type of society. There are indeed Christian socialists as well as Christian capitalists.

The Christian ethic of love from the very first created an attitude of pacifism toward violence and war. Jesus' own example and teaching lent strong support for this: "If any one strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other one also" (Luke 6:29), "love your enemies" (Luke 6:35), and so forth. Christian pacifism was the rule for the first centuries, until the Roman Empire became Christian and the need arose for Christian political leaders to take responsibility for maintaining order and justice in society. At that point the doctrine of the "just war" was developed by theologians such as Augustine. In this theory, Christian participation in violence or war is held to be justified if it meets certain requirements. The war must be entered into only as a last resort, for a just cause of defense or protection, declared by a lawful authority, and with a reasonable prospect of success. The war must be conducted justly without excess violence or harming of noncombatants, the means used must be proportional to the end result, and mercy must be shown to the vanquished. Throughout the medieval period and until recently, most Christian denominations have supported the basic outline of the just war theory, although groups such as the Mennonites and the Quakers developed a strong position of nonviolence and pacifism.

In the face of modern warfare, however, many Christians find the whole idea of a "just war" to be untenable, since the necessary requirements could never be met, certainly not in nuclear warfare. So Christian churches are struggling anew with the problem of the love ethic: how to establish both justice and mercy in the volatile world of today with the enormous problems of nation-states and huge arsenals. Some still advocate a kind of just security ethic, reasoning that the welfare of the human race depends on a balance of military power in the world. Other Christians are finding new meaning in pacifism, not as a passive resignation but as active nonviolent pursuit of justice and peace. As a result, many Christians are active in peace movements in the East and in the West.

Responsibility and Mission in the World

The Christian church is made up of real communities of Christians throughout the world. But just as the Jewish people do, so also these people of God transcend particular space and time. The church is "catholic," that is, universal, extended through all the world and all time, past, present, and future. It represents all humankind. At the same time Christians believe the church is one, just as Christ is one. In spite of various divisions, in spite of different races and nationalities, all believers in Christ are united in one family of God.

A favorite image used by the New Testament writers to refer to the church is "the body of Christ." This emphasizes the oneness of the church, even though it encompasses a great variety of Christians. Just as a person's body has many members that work together for the good of the one body, so the diverse communities of Christians all live and work for the oneness and well-being of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4–5).

To say the church is the body of Christ is also to evoke the idea that Christ is still present in the world in this "body." All those who make up the church are Christ's ongoing presence within the world. Jesus commissioned his disciples: "Peace be to you! As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). In this way the church is defined by its role or mission—to be about loving, healing, forgiving, and reconciling the peoples of the world by being the continuing presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of human society. Generally, Christians speak of this mission both as a social responsibility and as a saving mission: both seeking the welfare of the world's people and bringing the saving gospel of Christ to them so they can believe and share the Christian hope.

In the World but Not of the World The world is God's good world, but it is also a fallen world and, therefore, participation in the life of the world is an ambiguous thing. Jesus left Christians with a rule of thumb: They should be *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:11, 16). Being of the world, in the language of the times, meant to have the fallen, lust-driven world as one's source of being. Christians, rather, are born of the Spirit. Yet they are to be in the world, for it is still the world that God has redeemed, and Christians are to continue the presence of Christ in the world for that purpose.

Christians agree on the mission to bring the gospel to the world. But what does this mean in relation to the cultural and societal existence of people? What about government, economics, art and literature, oppression, poverty, and all the rest? Christians have not completely agreed on what the church's responsibility is toward the concrete problems and possibilities of this world. For some Christians, the only possibility is total withdrawal and renunciation of the world

as hopelessly evil. For others, the coming of God's kingdom is understood to be identical with social improvement and the perfecting of this world's potentials. Both of these are radical positions: either Christianity is in total opposition to this world's culture or it is totally identical with the best of it. Most Christians have not accepted either of these radical positions but have sought some middle ground to live out the role of being in but not of the world.

Among these various approaches, a dualist view and a transformationist view have been particularly dominant. The dualist view would understand this world to be primarily a preparation for the next, with the conclusion that Christians have no special role to play in the social, political, economic, and cultural arenas. As human beings, of course, Christians should be good citizens and work to the extent of their abilities for the betterment of life. But Christ came, they say, not as a social worker but as the savior. Therefore, the church's mission is not primarily to change the effects of original sin (poverty, oppression, and violence) but to bring people to eternal salvation.

The transformationist approach sees things a bit differently. To be sent as Christ was sent means being involved in loving one's neighbors, easing people's sufferings, and actively seeking to transform the structures that control this world. This approach does not deny the fallenness of the world or the mission of spiritual salvation. But God is still active in the creation. If Jesus Christ is indeed the first fruits of the new creation, and Christians are his presence in the world, then it is a high priority for Christians to be involved in whatever it takes to transform human society and culture so that it more completely reflects God's will and design. Motivated by this vision, many Christians of today are actively involved in movements of liberation, peacemaking, betterment of education and the arts, enhancing the dignity of women and minorities, and the like.

Mission to the World The identity of the Christian church has been deeply shaped by the charge that Christ gave to his disciples before his ascension into heaven:

> Go forth and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, until the end of the age.
>
> (Matthew 28:19–20)

The missionary emphasis in this "great commission" is not just on being in the world or bettering the world but also teaching and making disciples of all peoples. So evangelism, sharing the good news of Christ in order to bring others to faith in Christ, has always been a central activity of Christians.

Carrying out this mission of witnessing has had its high and low points in the history of the church. Many early Christians traveled widely, spent their lives learning new cultures, debated and argued, performed great works of love, and even sacrificed their lives in witnessing the good news of Christ. After Christianity became dominant in the Roman Empire, missionary activity tended to become tied to imperialistic goals, and that has been a special burden for the Christian mission down to the present century. The need to integrate Christian witnessing with an attitude that values and respects those of other religions has become much more urgent in the modern global village. Many Christians today are rediscovering that, in its origins, Christianity was a religion of humility and love. Being Christ's presence in the world means sharing one's deepest beliefs and hopes with others, but it also means listening to them and learning from them in dialogue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the main elements of the Sunday worship service? What differences might there be between liturgical and nonliturgical churches?
2. What are sacraments? Discuss the main sacraments in the liturgical churches.
3. Describe the main movement of Christian festivals throughout the year, especially the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany season and the Lent-Easter season.
4. Discuss the rituals associated with the main passages of life for Christians.
5. What key Christian ideas come to the fore in their understanding and practice of healing and medicine?
6. How does the Christian emphasis on God's incarnation relate to Christian artistic expression? Which arts seem important for Christians?
7. Discuss the meaning of the "church." How can it be both universal and local, both one and many?
8. Discuss the role of women in Christian religious leadership, both historically and in the present.

9 What is the relationship between law, freedom, and love in Christian ethics? How might these elements come into play in difficult ethical decisions today?
10 Is there a Christian position on ethical issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and physician-assisted suicide? Explain why or why not.
11 Pacifism has been an important tradition from earliest times in Christianity—why? What is meant by the "just war" doctrine? What is the stand of major church groups today?
12 Would you say that Christians are highly involved in changing the world for the better? Or do they seem more concerned about faith and the world to come?

KEY TERMS: CHRISTIANITY

Abba Aramaic term for "father" used by Jesus in addressing God
Advent season of the Christian church year before the celebration of Christmas
Apostles' Creed statement of faith dating from the second century C.E., universally accepted by Christians
Arianism a teaching advocated by the priest Arius and his followers that Christ was created in time as the Son of God; this teaching was rejected by the Council of Nicea
atonement doctrine of how humans are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ's work
Augustine leading theologian (354–430) in the early Christian church; bishop of Hippo in North Africa
baptism ritual of initiation into the Christian church through washing of water, viewed as a sacrament by many
Bible sacred scripture for Christians, consisting of the Old Testament (Christian term for the Hebrew scriptures) and the New Testament
canon a standard; refers to the accepted writings that make up the Bible and to other church standards such as canon law
catholic "universal," pertaining to the whole Christian church; Catholic also designates more specific bodies, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and others
Christ Greek title meaning "anointed one" from Hebrew "messiah," applied to Jesus of Nazareth by his followers
Christmas *see* Feast of the Nativity
Christology doctrine about the nature and role of Christ
church the community of all Christians; also specific groups, congregations, and buildings used for worship
clergy ordained church leaders; in the early Christian church, bishops were appointed as overseers, assisted by presbyters (priests) and deacons, and similar clergy roles have continued to the present day, with many variants in the different churches and denominations
confirmation ritual of reaffirming vows taken in baptism; considered a sacrament by some
Constantine Roman emperor (273–337) who legalized and promoted Christianity
Council of Nicea first great church council, convened in 325 to settle disputes about the nature of Christ
Council of Trent council convened by the pope in 1545 to reform the church and oppose the actions of the Protestants
crusades attempts by Christians of western Europe to recapture the Holy Land by force
denomination church organization consisting of a number of congregations, having autonomous structure and usually distinctive teachings, especially within Protestantism
Docetism teaching by some in the early church that Christ only appeared to be human; this teaching eventually was rejected by church councils
Easter festival celebrating the resurrection of Christ
ecumenical movement modern movement to achieve understanding, cooperation, and some form of unity between the various branches of Christianity
Epiphany season after Christmas emphasizing the "showing forth" of Christ to the world; some Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate the nativity of Christ during this time
eschatology doctrine about the last things: the end of the world, judgment day, consummation of God's plan
Eucharist principal Christian sacrament, using bread and wine as a reenactment or remembrance of Christ's last supper; also called Mass, Lord's Supper, Divine Liturgy, and Holy Communion
Feast of the Nativity celebration of the birthday of Jesus; Christians of the Western churches celebrate this on December 25, while some Eastern Orthodox Christians observe this feast on January 6
Fundamentalism in Christianity, a movement by conservative Protestants to reject modernity in Christianity,

advocating the literal inerrancy of scripture and strict adherence to traditional doctrine and morality

Gnosticism movement in the Hellenistic world that emphasized a special secret knowledge about God and the world, holding to a dualism of spirit and matter

gospels writings compiled in the early church proclaiming the story of Jesus' life and death; the four canonical gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

grace theological term meaning reception of spiritual goals as given by God rather than attained by one's own effort

great commission commission given by Christ to his disciples to go and "make disciples" of all nations

incarnation "becoming flesh"; especially the Christian teaching that the eternal Son of God became human in the womb of his mother Mary

judgment day the day on which God will judge all according to their faith and their deeds

justification by faith doctrine that justification before God comes by faith, not by good works; a central emphasis of Martin Luther

Kingdom of God the rule of God; proclaimed by Jesus as a present reality, yet to be fully manifested in the future

Lent Christian season of penitence in preparation for the Easter celebration

liturgy order of prayer, scripture reading, hymns, and exhortations followed in a worship service

mass Roman Catholic term for the Eucharistic service

Messiah end-time king, descended from King David, expected to redeem Israel; Christians identified the Messiah (Greek *christos*) with Jesus

monasticism the way of life of monks and nuns, usually celibate, without personal possessions, and dedicated to meditation, prayer, study, and service

Nicene Creed doctrinal formulation from the Council of Nicea, setting forth the orthodox understanding of the Trinity

Old Testament Christian designation for the Hebrew scriptures

original sin teaching that all humans share a basic condition of sinfulness

Orthodox Church term referring to the historic Eastern Christian churches, including the Greek, Russian, Armenian, and other traditions

parables stories by which Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom of God

passion story the climax of each of the four Gospels, telling of the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus

Paul leading apostle who brought the gospel of Christ to non-Jews and whose letters form part of the New Testament

Pentecost festival approximately seven weeks after Easter, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early Christians

pietism a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, emphasizing the experience of God's grace and emotional dedication

plan of salvation God's design for the salvation of the world, foretold through prophets and accomplished through Jesus Christ

Protestantism broad designation for the main churches of the Reformation

Reformation reform movements in the Christian church, especially the reform of the European church through the work of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others

resurrection rising from the dead; in Christian belief, Christ's resurrection as the first fruit of the resurrection of all at the end of the world

Roman Catholic Church the historic Western church as it has continued under the leadership of the pope, the bishop of Rome

sacraments rituals that convey God's grace, such as baptism and the Eucharist

soteriology theory of salvation through Jesus Christ

theology thinking about God and God's work

Trinity the doctrine that the one God is revealed in three "persons"—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Chapter 12

Muslim Sacred Story and Historical Context

Today Muslims make up about one-fifth of the people of the world. Significantly, the heart of the Muslim population is not in the industrialized countries, as is the case with Christianity, but in the developing areas of the world. To be **Muslim** means to find one's identity in the sacred story of a man born in the Arabian peninsula, namely, the prophet Muhammad. To Muslims, Muhammad is the final agent of God's revelation, the seal of the prophets. The story of the Muslims tells of the miracle of that revelation, the **Quran**, and the establishing of the community of Islam, the **ummah**.

THE STORY OF THE PROPHET AND THE BOOK

The Jewish scriptures and the Christian scriptures contain much material about Moses and Jesus, as well as narratives about the other important founders and events. In contrast, the Muslim scripture, the Holy Quran, is predominantly God's message to humans and, thus, contains very little narration about Muhammad and the events that led to the founding of Islam. Whereas some of the suras of the Quran can be placed in the context of events in Muhammad's life, for the most part the Muslim story of the founding of Islam relies on reports (*hadiths*) from Muhammad's companions, material that has become known as the **Hadith**. Based on material from the Hadith, there are many early Muslim biographies of Muhammad's life; the best known is by Ibn Ishaq in the middle of the eighth century C.E., about 120 years after Muhammad's death.

The Times Before Muhammad

As in the case of Christianity, the Islamic sacred history links itself clearly with the religions that preceded it, Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad, of course, was not a Jew or a Christian, but the Muslim tradition considers him to be the legitimate successor of and fulfillment of the founders of both previous religions. The Muslim story joins the Jewish and Christian stories in telling of God's work: God created the world and Adam and Eve, and from them all peoples. God sent **prophets** such as Abraham, Moses, and David to guide humankind. And God worked through Mary and made her son Jesus a great prophet. Of course, the Muslim story interprets these events and prophets somewhat differently than do the Jewish and Christian stories, but it is important that the link is made. The revelation in Islam is the fulfillment and the end of the revelations that God has been giving since Adam and the beginning of the human race.

The Prophet Abraham One specific link with the past religious history is of particular significance for the Muslim story: Muslims are not Jewish, but Abraham is also their ancestor. Abraham, the Quran says, lived before there was a Jewish or Christian religion; he surrendered himself to God in practicing the pure religion, the same revelation that God gave to all the prophets and to Muhammad. Abraham was the father of both Isaac, who was the ancestor of the Jews, and Ishmael, who became the ancestor of the Muslims. Ishmael was actually the firstborn of Abraham; in her barrenness, Abraham's wife Sarah gave her maid **Hagar** to Abraham for a wife, and Abraham had Ishmael by her. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael, he proved faithful; both he and his son submitted to God, and

God blessed them (Quran 37:103). Abraham practiced the true religion of Islam (*islam* means "submission" to God) and, thus, he was a *muslim* ("submitter").

Muslim tradition says that, when Sarah forced Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, Abraham brought them to Mecca and later visited Ishmael there. According to the Quran, God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to purify God's house in Mecca, the Ka'bah, which had been destroyed by the flood. So Abraham and Ishmael submitted to God and rebuilt the house, purifying it and making it a refuge and a place of pilgrimage (2:124–127). The stone on which Abraham stood is still seen in the great mosque at Mecca, a constant reminder to pilgrims that Islam continues the pure religion of Abraham the muslim. The Quran states that Abraham prayed, "My Lord, make this land secure, and turn me and my sons away from serving idols. . . . Our Lord, I have made some of my seed to dwell in a valley where is no sown land by Thy Holy House; Our Lord, let them perform the prayer" (14:35–37).[1] Abraham and Ishmael prayed that Allah would raise up a messenger in the midst of their descendants who would declare God's revelations to them and instruct them in the scriptures and in wisdom (2:129). Thus, it was among the descendants of Abraham and Ishmael in Mecca that the pure worship of the one God was preserved, and, when it was forgotten, from their midst God raised up a new prophet and a new community of Muslims.

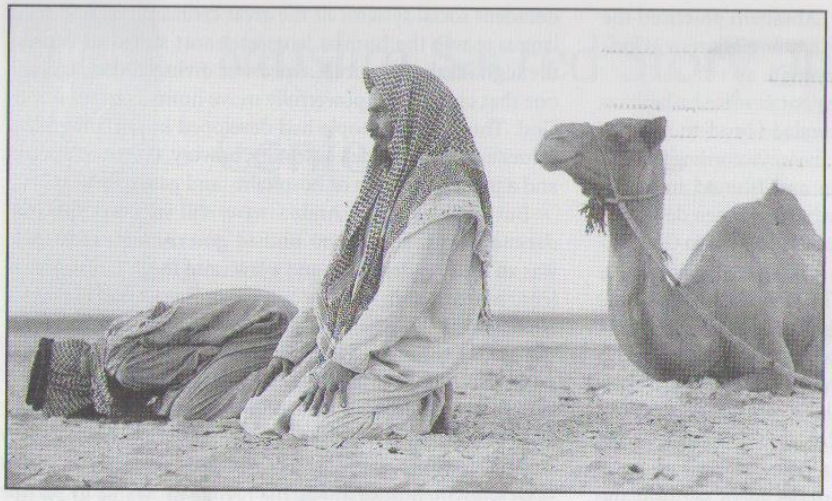
The Times of Ignorance According to the Muslim story, the world of 1,500 years ago had become exceedingly dark, and humanity was steeped in ignorance and superstition. The religions revealed through Moses and Jesus, though they had originally been pure Islam, had been distorted by Jews and Christians. A new religion was needed that would be for the whole human race. At such a crucial stage of human civilization, God raised up a prophet in Arabia for the whole world. The religion God gave him to propagate was Islam, like all the prophets before, but now it was in the form of a complete and full-fledged system, covering all aspects of human life.

Arabia was the best-suited country for the birth of the much-needed world religion, according to the Muslim story. It was situated right between two great civilizations, the Byzantine and the Persian empires, and the Arabs were a fresh and energetic people, not affected by the artificial and decadent social systems of the great civilizations. And their language was the human language most suited to express the high ideals and subtle aspects of divine knowledge, the one that could most powerfully move humans to submit to God. These desert people had developed important ethical values and virtues, such as loyalty, bravery, the art of poetry, and a pervading sense of hospitality and generosity.

But the people of Arabia were still in deep spiritual darkness. As there was no unified government, each tribe was an independent unit and a law unto itself. Life was violent, murder and robbery were common, and the most trivial incidents often set off prolonged blood wars between the tribes. Their ignorance extended to morality; they indulged in adultery, gambling, and drinking. Because daughters were considered a burden, they even practiced infanticide of infant daughters.

Although they had a vague idea that Abraham and Ishmael were their forefathers, the people of Arabia knew little about the teaching of the prophets of old. The Jews and Christians who lived in Arabia had passed on some of their teachings, but their ideas about the prophets were distorted and filled with figments of their own imagination. The Arabs worshiped many gods and divine forces. Trees and springs were venerated; sacred stones were rubbed or kissed to derive power from them; other spirits of the desert and the oasis played important roles. There was the high God called Al-Lah (the God) who was thought to be creator of the world. There were also three special goddesses spoken of as the daughters of Al-Lah: Al-Lat, a mother goddess associated with the moon; Al-'Uzza, the goddess of the planet Venus; and the mysterious goddess of fate called Manat. These three goddesses are mentioned in the Quran (53:19–20). Al-'Uzza in particular was worshiped by sacrifice (perhaps human sacrifice), and she was associated with stone pillars, symbolic of generative power. There were shrines for these gods and goddesses in various places.

The city of Mecca was a special sacred area, with its ancient shrine called the Ka'bah (which contained many images of gods), a sacred well called Zamzam, two holy mountains, and many sacred stones and pillars. During part of the year, a truce from fighting was observed by the desert tribes so that they could make pilgrimages to Mecca to worship the gods and goddesses and participate



Bedouin in the Arabian desert pause for the ritual of prayer to Allah.

in festivals. Rituals included circling around the Ka'bah (sometimes naked) and running back and forth between the two hills.

This was "the age of ignorance" (*al-jahiliyyah*), according to the Muslim story.

Muhammad as the Final Prophet

By the time Muhammad was born in 570 C.E., Mecca had become a cosmopolitan city. Some of the desert tribes had given up bedouin life and settled in Mecca, tending the sacred sites and participating in the active caravan trade that crisscrossed the desert. There was some rivalry among the tribes that made up the Quraysh, as these tribes of Mecca were called. Muhammad's grandfather, 'Abd al-Muttalib of the Banu Hashim family, seems to have been prominent among the Quraysh about the time Muhammad was born, but soon the **Umayyad** family came to dominate and the Hashim fell on bad times. 'Abd al-Muttalib had a number of wives from different clans who gave him ten sons and six daughters (Muhammad's father and his uncles and aunts). For his son 'Abdallah he obtained as a bride Amina bint Wahb, and their first and only child was Muhammad.

'Abdallah died either during Amina's pregnancy or shortly thereafter, leaving his wife impoverished. According to custom, the infant Muhammad was given over to a nurse from a bedouin clan so that he might be filled with the culture of the desert. He was reunited with his mother Amina when he was about five, but she died soon after. Muhammad, orphaned from both parents, lived with his grandfather, who died when he was eight, and then with his uncle Abu Talib, who now was the head of the Hashim clan. Abu Talib brought Muhammad up, at least once taking him along on a caravan trip to Syria. As a young man, Muhammad began to work for the caravan company of a wealthy widow named Khadija; she was impressed by him and soon they were married. He was twenty-five at the time, and she was fifteen years older; yet she still bore him six children, four daughters and two sons who died in infancy. Now Muhammad had become a secure, respected member of Meccan society.

The Light of Prophecy Rests on Muhammad Such is the bare outline of the first part of Muhammad's life. But the Muslim sacred history makes it clear that, from the very beginning, God had designs for this man, and this is indicated by extraordinary events reported in the traditional biographies. For example, a story about Muhammad's conception relates that 'Abdallah had a white blaze between his eyes when he went in to Amina, but the light disappeared when Muhammad was conceived; the light of prophecy had been passed on in the conception of Muhammad. And while Amina was pregnant the light shone from her so that she could see as far as Syria. Another story tells that Muhammad saw two angels come to open his breast and clean his heart. Then they put him on scales, putting on the other side of the scales first ten of his people, then a hundred, then a thousand, and he outweighed them all. Then one angel said, "Leave him alone, for by God, if you weighed him against all his people he

would outweigh them." Yet another story is told about a trip to Syria with his uncle, where a Christian monk named Bahira recognized Muhammad as the envoy of God, in accordance with the Christian writings. Bahira then examined Muhammad's back and found the seal of prophecy between his shoulders.[2] Thus, even a learned holy man of the Christians recognized that Muhammad was to be the prophet of God.

As a young man Muhammad showed himself to be honest, moral, and wise, even though he was unschooled. He tended to the sick and organized a movement to protect the weak and fight for the rights of the oppressed in the violent society of Mecca. He became known as Al-Amin, the trusted one. At one time the people of Mecca were rebuilding the Ka'bah, but leaders of the four main clans fell into a bitter dispute over who would have the honor of putting the revered Black Stone back in its position. They appealed to Muhammad as an arbitrator, and he placed the Black Stone in the middle of a cloak and had the clan leaders lift the stone by the corners of the cloak, himself putting it back into its place in the wall of the Ka'bah. During these years, the story holds, Muhammad held himself apart from the pagan religious practices of the Quraysh, even though he had not yet received the revelation of monotheism from God.

The Night of Power Muhammad, now a respected man among the Quraysh, was not yet content, for he was troubled about the religious practices of the Meccans. He felt the need to find solitude and meditate, so he started retiring for days at a time to a cave in the mountain of Hira nearby. One day, when he was about forty, he came home from the cave greatly agitated and cried out, "Cover me, Khadija, cover me!" as he lay prostrate on the floor. After a while he told her about a vision of the angel Gabriel in the cave:

> He came to me while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said "Read." I said, "What shall I read?"—and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again. He said:
>
> Read in the name of thy Lord who created,
> Who created man of blood coagulated.
>
> Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent,
> Who taught by the pen,
> Taught that which they knew not unto men.
>
> (Quran 96:1–5)[3]

As reported in the Quran, in a vivid vision he saw a glorious being standing erect high up in the sky near the horizon; then the angel moved down until he was only two bow-shots from Muhammad (Quran 53:1–18). It is said that Muhammad in his panic over this visionary experience thought to throw himself over a precipice—but then he heard a voice from heaven hailing him: "O Muhammad, you are the Messenger of God!"[4] Khadija comforted Muhammad and told him to rejoice, since God would not forsake him. She sent him to her cousin Waraqa, a monotheist who was versed in Jewish and Christian writings, and Waraqa told him this was truly a revelation from God. This night of the first revelation, believed by many to be the night of the 26th of Ramadan, was later to be called "the night of power," a night that was worth a thousand months (Quran 97:1–5). God (**Allah**) had sent down divine revelation through the angel Gabriel upon Muhammad.

For many days after this the revelation did not come again, although Muhammad secluded himself in the cave, thirsting after the glorious vision he had seen. But then the revelations came again; the angel appeared again and spoke, "O thou wrapped in thy mantle, arise, and warn!" (74:1–2). And the revelations continued to come over the next years, now causing less surprise and terror, though these were still deep spiritual experiences for Muhammad.

Proclaiming the Revelation in Mecca Khadija was the first one in Mecca to accept Muhammad's words as true revelation from God. Soon afterward, Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr, his cousin 'Ali (son of Abu Talib), and Zayd, a slave freed by Muhammad, submitted to the new revelation. Thus began the new religion that would be known as Islam. At first Muhammad preached quietly and secretively to people who would listen about the new revelations, and in three years there were about forty followers for this new faith, mostly young men and some outside the clan system. But after that three-year period revelations came from God telling him to preach openly to all the Meccans.

As Muhammad now began openly to proclaim the revelations he was receiving from God, more converts were

made, but the vast majority of the Meccans became angry and grew hostile to him. The revelation from God warned them to give up their false gods and worship only the one God, to abstain from promiscuity and lust, to live in virtue, and to treat one another with kindness and equality. This was a message that they found threatening to their way of life. It would mean giving up their tribal gods and rituals, the way of life of their fathers; it would mean abandoning many of the luxuries and pleasures of the kind of life they were accustomed to; it would mean reforming Meccan society and, thus, threatening the position of the wealthy merchants; it would mean giving up the lucrative pilgrimage trade.

Muhammad continued to proclaim his message whenever he could, at fairs, during the pilgrimages, in the marketplace. At first the opposing Meccans mocked and jeered at him, and even his uncle Abu Lahab called him a madman. The Meccans would throw dirt and excrement on him as he passed by. They demanded that he produce some sign to testify that he was a prophet or perform some miracle. Muhammad simply insisted that the only miracle was the revelation sent by God, and he challenged them to produce a writing like it—which they could not do.

Some of those who converted and became Muslims were treated violently by the Meccans. But Muhammad's own Hashimite clan, headed by his uncle Abu Talib, stood by its obligation to protect Muhammad as a member of the clan, even though Abu Talib and most of the Hashim refused to become Muslims. At one point the other Meccans sent a delegation to Abu Talib demanding that he withdraw his protection, but the uncle was resolute. Another time they offered to give Muhammad anything he wanted if he would stop his persistent preaching—money, honor, kingship, even a cure from the spirit possessing him. But Muhammad insisted that he wanted neither money, honor, nor power; God had simply sent him as a messenger, revealed a book to him, and commanded him to be an announcer and a warner. They challenged him to remove the mountains that shut Mecca in and open up rivers or to resurrect their fathers—then they would believe. Muhammad simply persisted: He had brought God's message to them, and they could either accept it or reject it and await God's judgment.

Since they could neither get Muhammad to give in nor get his clan to repudiate him, the other clans of the Quraysh tried a political move; they ordered a social and economic boycott of the Hashim clan: No one should have any dealings with them, sell food to them, visit or converse with them. The boycott lasted for several years, causing a good deal of suffering and hardship. But Abu Talib and the Hashim maintained the clan's obligation to protect Muhammad, and eventually the boycott was ended.

Crisis in Mecca During these difficult years, Muhammad continued to receive revelations from God. One night, the story relates, Muhammad was sleeping next to the Ka'bah, when the angel Gabriel came to him. Mounted on the wondrous steed Buraq, Muhammad rode through the sky to Jerusalem, where he prayed at the "farthest mosque" (the site of the temple; Quran 17:1). Then Gabriel led Muhammad through the seven heavens into the presence of God. This great spiritual experience of Muhammad has always been a model for Muslims of the mystical experience of God's presence.

Conversions to Islam also continued during these years, in spite of the difficulties. One important convert was 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, who had been an active opponent and even struck his sister when she became a Muslim. But when he listened to the Quran being recited he was so moved that he professed submission to God. **'Umar**, who later became the second caliph, was strong and active and contributed much to the growth of the Islamic community.

The year 619 C.E. brought new trials for Muhammad and the Muslims. The death of his wife was a deep personal loss, for she had been a strong support for him. Also, his uncle Abu Talib died, and he was succeeded as head of the Hashim clan by Abu Lahab, another uncle of Muhammad's who had already been strongly antagonistic. At first Abu Lahab appeared reluctant to withdraw the traditional protection of the clan, but Muhammad's continued attacks on the clan as unbelievers provoked the uncle to look for some way to reject him. He asked Muhammad point-blank whether Abu Talib, who never became a Muslim, and his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib (who died when Muhammad was a young boy) were condemned to hell as unbelievers. When Muhammad answered that they were, Abu Lahab angrily considered this a grave insult to the leaders of the clan and withdrew his protection.

Establishing the Ummah in Medina

Unable to preach safely in Mecca, Muhammad went to the neighboring city of Ta'if and preached for ten days, but the people there only ridiculed him. Back in Mecca the situation grew dangerous. However, about this time (620 C.E.) six men from Medina, an oasis settlement 200 miles north of Mecca, came to Mecca for the religious fair, and they were impressed with Muhammad's personality and his message. Medina was made up of about a dozen different tribes, including some Jewish tribes, and a long-standing blood feud was causing much difficulty. An even-handed mediator was urgently needed. The next year these Medinans came back with others, representing most of the tribes; they made a promise to Muhammad to accept him as prophet. Muhammad sent a trusty Muslim back with them to instruct them, and by June 622 a representative party of seventy-five people from Medina made the pilgrimage to Mecca. They met secretly with Muhammad and pledged to fight on behalf of God and God's messenger Muhammad.

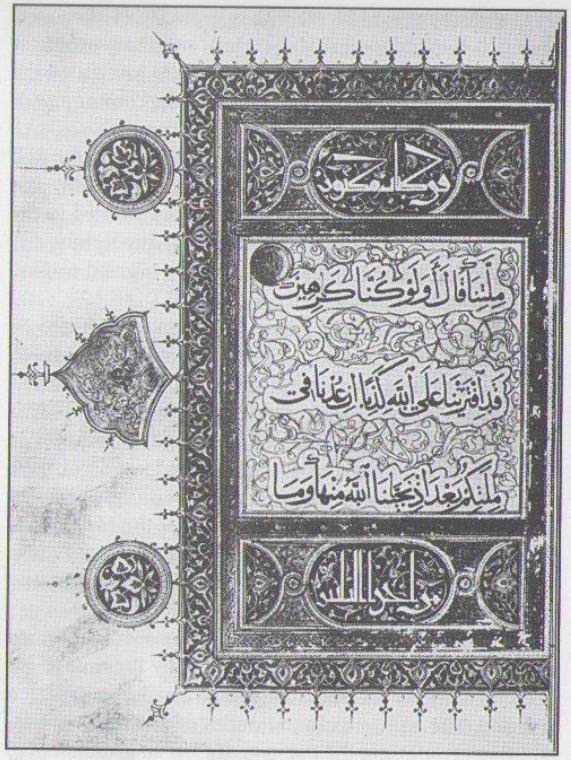
Hijra: Immigration to Medina and Founding of the Ummah In small groups over the next months, Muhammad's followers in Mecca began slipping out and migrating to Medina. Muhammad himself, together with Abu Bakr and 'Ali, remained until the last minute, to detract attention from this escape. The enemies of the prophet grew alarmed at the prospect of a power base for Muslims in Medina and decided to seize and kill him, with a member of each clan striking together so that all would share the responsibility for his blood. On the night they came, 'Ali lay in Muhammad's bed while Muhammad and Abu Bakr escaped and hid in a cave for three days. Finally, they reached Medina on September 24, 622, to the great joy of the Muslims in Medina. Upon their offer of quarters, Muhammad loosened his camel, and when she stopped in an empty lot in the quarter of the Banu Najjar, Muhammad chose that as the site to build his house, which was also to be used as a **mosque** (*masjid*) (hall of prayer). This immigration of the Muslim community from Mecca to Medina is called the Hijra; with it began a new age in the Islamic movement, and in honor of that Muslims date their calendar from the first day of this lunar year. The year 622 C.E. is Hijra year 1 in the Islamic calendar, because now, for the first time, the community of Muslims could put the whole Islamic system of life into full practice.

The Muslims from Mecca who migrated to Medina were known as the Emigrants (Muhajirun), and those people of Medina who received the Emigrants were known as the Helpers (Ansar). Together they made up the community of Islam, the ummah. The ummah is a community based on a common faith, a community of prayer and worship as well as a community with its own government, economy, and military force. The basis of this ummah is recorded in the Constitution of Medina, which states that any serious dispute between parties in Medina must be referred to God and the prophet Muhammad.

Whereas most of the tribes of Medina submitted to Muhammad's religious authority, the Jewish tribes refused to recognize him as the new prophet from God, and eventually most of these Jewish tribes were expelled from Medina. There were also tensions among the Muslims: The Helpers suspected they were being treated unfairly by the Emigrants; and some Medinans only superficially accepted Islam and subsequently became known as the Hypocrites. In spite of these tensions, the ummah thrived and grew, and Muhammad's role as both their religious leader and their political leader became stronger.

During these years at Medina, Muhammad continued to receive revelations from God, so that by the time of his death in 632 C.E., the entire content of the Quran had been revealed. The basic rituals and duties of Muslims were established: confessing the oneness of God and Muhammad as God's prophet, ritual washing and prayer, giving alms, fasting, and pilgrimage. The regulations on matters of religious law were either revealed to Muhammad or stipulated by him on the basis of the revelation in the Quran. One important revelation was the change in direction in which the Muslims should face to say their prayers. Previously they had faced Jerusalem in prayer, but now God revealed that they should face the Ka'bah in Mecca (2:142–150).

In these revelations, the crucial role of Muhammad as the last of the whole line of prophets was established. God had been sending prophets ever since the beginning of the human race—some twenty-five are mentioned by name in the Quran, including Adam, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, David, Solomon, Job, and others. Jesus is mentioned many times in the Quran as an important prophet in the sacred story and, thus, the prophet Jesus is highly regarded by Muslims. Conceived in Mary's womb by God's command, Jesus was sent as the Messiah to the Jewish people to bring God's revelation. Healed the sick and raised the



A highly decorated page from a thirteenth-century manuscript of the Quran.

dead by God's power. Some charged him with crimes and attempted to crucify him, but God took Jesus to paradise, from where he will return before **Judgment Day**. Muhammad continues this line of prophets, but he is the "seal of the prophets," through whom God has sent down the final, perfect revelation.

Muhammad's own family played an important role in the formation of the community of Islam. After his wife Khadija died in 619, he married numerous other wives and established the model of an active, dedicated Muslim household. Almost all of these wives were widows of Muslims killed in battles with the Meccans and other hostile tribes. For example, Hafsah, daughter of 'Umar, had been widowed by the age of twenty. Among Muhammad's wives, she had the distinction of being one who could read and write and, according to some Muslim traditions, helped to collate the separate leaves of the Holy Book, the Quran. One wife who was not a widow was 'Aisha, the young daughter of Abu Bakr; she was especially lively and caught the interest of the community. She lived some fifty years after Muhammad's death and left more reports (*hadiths*) about Muhammad than anyone else did. Collectively the wives of the prophet were highly respected and were known as the "Mothers of the Believers."

Submission of Mecca With the development of the ummah at Medina, the new religion was now fully in place, and the age of ignorance was over—except that the holy city of Mecca was still in the hands of unbelievers. In 624, two years after the Hijra, a Meccan army headed for Medina. Outnumbered three to one, the Muslims were uncertain whether God wanted them to defend themselves, that is, to fight in the name of their religion. God revealed to Muhammad in a sura, perhaps at this time:

> Assuredly God will defend those who believe; surely God loves not any ungrateful traitor. Leave is given to those who fight because they were wronged—surely God is able to help them—who were expelled from their habitations without right, except that they say "Our Lord is God."
>
> (22:38–40)

In this battle at Badr, God gave victory to the Muslims, the army "fighting in the way of God" (3:13). The victory was a turning point for the Muslim community, for it established the conviction that God would see to it that the divine will would be carried out in historical events. The Meccans made two more major assaults. In 625 they nearly killed Muhammad at the battle of Uhud. And in 627 a Jewish tribe and the Hypocrites joined the Meccans in an assault on Medina. This serious threat was met when the Muslims, on the advice of a Persian convert, dug a trench around the city, frustrating the tribal war tactics of the Meccans. After this, Muhammad consolidated the Muslim position in Medina and the surrounding area, and the time came to end the problem of Mecca.

Although Muhammad now had the strength to assault Mecca, he turned to conciliation instead. He made a ten-year peace truce with the Meccans, and in 629 (Hijrah 7), Muhammad and a host of Muslims went on a

pilgrimage to Mecca. In keeping with the peace truce, the city was vacated of its inhabitants during the Muslims' three-day visit. But soon the Meccans again instigated hostility, and on January 1, 630 (Hijrah 8), Muhammad set off with a force of ten thousand men toward Mecca. While they were still a day's journey from the city, a delegation of Meccans met them and offered to submit to the new faith. Muhammad entered the city in peace, treating the Meccans with great magnanimity and giving them a general clemency. And he personally entered the Ka'bah and destroyed the 360 idols, proclaiming, "God is great! Truth has come. Falsehood has vanished."[5] Henceforth this was to be the shrine of Allah alone, and it was to be tended and visited only by Muslims. And the former unbelievers of Mecca submitted to Allah and became Muslims.

Muhammad soon dispatched emissaries to all parts of Arabia to preach Islam to the tribes and tear down pagan temples. Several tribes had to be subdued by force, but in 631 (Hijrah 9), the "year of delegations," many former pagan tribes of Arabia sent representatives to Mecca to offer their submission to God and their fighting men to Muhammad. Now they entered God's religion in crowds, as God said to the prophet: "When comes the help of God, and victory, and thou seest men entering God's religion in throngs, then proclaim the praise of thy Lord, and see His forgiveness; for he turns again unto men" (sura 110). And Muhammad sent out teachers to teach the precepts of Islam to these tribes, telling them to deal gently with the people. Christian and Jewish tribes in Arabia reached agreements with Muhammad, paying a tax in return for protected status.

Muhammad had fulfilled his mission: much of Arabia had submitted—a land and a people that had never before been united under any set of ideals. Idolatry was destroyed; superstition and vice were replaced by faith and virtue. Blood kinship for the first time was subordinated to a community based on faith that offered equal rights and justice for all. Laws from Allah regarding charity, acting justly, observing peace, worshiping God, and the like were now commonly accepted by all even across tribal lines. In the short period of twenty years since his first revelation, Muhammad had realized a goal of Islam: the whole people of Arabia united in one brotherhood, fulfilling in their lives the total design of the one God.

Muhammad's Final Pilgrimage Muhammad returned once more to Mecca with a large group of followers in March 632 (Hijra 10) to make what turned out to be his "farewell pilgrimage." The city had been purified of all traces of idolatry, and now Muhammad established the model for the pilgrimage ritual (**Hajj**), which, he decreed, could only be performed by Muslims. He retained many of the earlier pilgrimage traditions, such as circling the Ka'bah seven times, kissing the Black Stone, running between the two hills, drinking water from the well of Zamzam, and throwing pebbles at the stone pillars. But these rituals were now completely disassociated from polytheistic ideas and restored to their meaning as acts of submission to the one God. Ever since that final pilgrimage, Muslims have participated in Muhammad's story by retracing his steps and repeating the rituals of the pilgrimage as he did.

During the closing rituals of the pilgrimage, astride his camel atop Mt. Arafat, Muhammad spoke his "farewell" sermon to the assembled multitudes, saying:

> O men, listen to my words. I do not know whether I shall ever meet you in this place again after this year. Your blood and your property are sacrosanct until you meet your Lord, as this day and this month are holy. You will surely meet your Lord and He will ask you of your works. . . . I have left with you something which if you will hold fast to it you will never fall into error—a plain indication, the book of God and the practice of His prophet, so give good heed to what I say. Know that every Muslim is a Muslim's brother, and that the Muslims are brethren.

Muhammad's sermon ended with this statement: "O God, have I not told you?" And the assembled multitude echoed, "O God, yes!" And the prophet said, "O God, bear witness!"[6]

Not long afterward the prophet fell ill in Medina. Though weak and feeble, he continued to lead the faithful in public prayer up to the third day prior to his death. In his last exhortation to the faithful assembled at prayer he said, "O men, the fire is kindled, and rebellions come like the darkness of the night. By God, you can lay nothing to my charge. I allow only what the Quran allows and forbid only what the Quran forbids."[7] He died a few hours later in the arms of his young wife 'Aisha in June 632 (Hijrah 10). And he was buried in 'Aisha's home, on the spot where later a mosque was erected.

There was concern and confusion among the Muslims during the days of Muhammad's illness, and when he died there were some who claimed that the apostle of God was not dead but would return. But Abu Bakr went into the house and kissed Muhammad, saying, "You are dearer than my father and mother. You have tasted the death which God had decreed: a second death will never overtake you." Then he went out and cried to the people: "O men, if anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead; if anyone worships God, God is alive, immortal!" Then Abu Bakr recited this verse from the Quran, which the Muslims had forgotten: "Muhammad is nothing but an apostle. Apostles have passed away before him. Can it be that if he were to die or be killed you would turn back on your heels? He who turns back does no harm to God and God will reward the grateful" (3:144). 'Umar, who had been saying Muhammad was not dead, now said, "By God, when I heard Abu Bakr recite these words I was dumfounded so that my legs would not bear me up and I fell to the ground knowing that the apostle was indeed dead."[8] Thus it was that an extremely important point was established in Islam: Muhammad is the prophet of God, but God alone is to be worshiped.

Because he was the prophet through whom God gave the Quran, however, Muhammad was looked to as the model for what a Muslim is to be and, therefore, his own story became the central story for Muslims to model their own lives after. His words and his actions, passed on by his companions in the traditions of the Hadith, provided the paradigm for interpreting the stipulations of the Quran and applying them to the various situations of life. In this sense the story of Muhammad is the story of every Muslim.

A Religion for All Peoples: Expansion of Islam

The story goes on, for until this point Islam had become the religion of the peoples of Arabia but not yet a universal religion beyond this limited area. Under the first four **caliphs** (deputies of Muhammad) the religion of Islam expanded to become a religion for peoples far beyond Arabia. These first four successors of Muhammad are called the "rightly guided caliphs."

Successors to Muhammad: The Caliphs Muhammad did not designate who should be his successor as leader of Islam, but after his death the Muslim leaders quickly decided that Abu Bakr, Muhammad's trusted friend, father-in-law, and one of the first converts to Islam, should be caliph. The role of caliph combined the offices of chief executive, commander-in-chief, chief justice, and leader (imam) of public worship—but not that of prophet, since Muhammad was the final prophet. Abu Bakr (r. 632–634 C.E.) was honest and deeply committed; it was said that he wept whenever he recited verses of the Quran. In the two years he was caliph before he died, he consolidated the unity of Islam among the tribes of Arabia, dealing resolutely with tribes that apostatized after the death of Muhammad, with those that refused to pay the alms tax, and with false prophets that arose. He also began the task of assembling and collating the scattered suras of the Quran, which were memorized and recited by many but not written down in one volume.

The next two caliphs, 'Umar (r. 634–644) and 'Uthman (r. 644–656), had also been early converts to Islam, and it was their contribution, in only about twenty years, to make Islam a world religion through great waves of Islamic expansion far beyond the Arabian peninsula: to Palestine (Jerusalem fell to 'Umar in 637), Syria, Persia, and Asia Minor, to Egypt and across northern Africa. Although this expansion was accompanied by military battles in a "holy war" for Allah, many of these people willingly accepted Islam as a liberation from their former oppressive rulers and religions. 'Umar adopted fair means of treating the Jews and Christians who fell subject to Islamic rulers; they were "people of the Book" and were guaranteed basic rights and freedom of worship in exchange for the head tax paid to the Muslims. 'Umar began the process of putting the guidance of the Quran into public law throughout the Muslim world, and 'Uthman had the official final recension of the Quran produced.

The fourth rightly guided caliph was **'Ali** (r. 656–661), Muhammad's cousin (son of Abu Talib), one of the first converts to Islam, who married Muhammad's daughter Fatima. 'Ali was a widely respected Muslim, a very close companion of the prophet. But a tragic period of internal fighting becomes part of the Muslim story at this point. The last part of 'Uthman's reign was marred by dissension between his own Umayyad family and the other Muslims,

leading to 'Uthman's assassination. After 'Ali was chosen as the fourth caliph, Mu'awiya, as leader of the Umayyad family, disputed his leadership. After an indecisive battle, arbitration was decided in favor of Mu'awiya and soon after that 'Ali was assassinated by fanatics (661). Mu'awiya then established the Umayyad Caliphate, which ruled the Islamic world from its capital at Damascus for the next century.

'Ali was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and Hasan and Husayn, the sons of 'Ali and Muhammad's daughter Fatima, were the surviving male heirs of Muhammad. Because of special interest in the family of Muhammad, there had long been a "faction (*shi'a*) of 'Ali" that felt 'Ali was the obvious successor to Muhammad. 'Ali was tragically assassinated, as were his son Husayn and others of the family—but these martyrdoms only gave impetus to the feeling among his faction, the **Shi'ites**, that the family of Muhammad, through 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and their descendants, should be the real spiritual leaders of Islam. The Shi'ites call these leaders **imams** rather than caliphs, tracing them down through a number of generations from Imam 'Ali. Most Shi'ites hold that there were twelve imams before the final one disappeared to return sometime in the future. Shi'ites look to these imams for special guidance, since the light of Muhammad was passed on to Imam 'Ali and on to the rest of the imams. Thus, the imams also have become part of the story for Shi'ites. In all the other important respects, however, the Shi'ites share the same story with the Sunnites, the majority group in Islam that looks to the four rightly guided caliphs as the proper successors to Muhammad.

The story culminates, then, in the rule of Islam as a unified, worldwide ummah, whether that is called the caliphate or the imamate. This is, of course, an ideal that has never been completely achieved. But it is the goal set forth in the Muslim story: that the ummah become the ideal human society, in which Muslims as representatives of true humanity submit their lives totally in accordance with God's will as revealed through the prophet Muhammad. The best way to achieve this goal is in the establishment of the Islamic state, as Muhammad and the early caliphs did, in which all the laws that govern life, in both the public and the private domains, are based on God's revelation in the Quran.

To be a Muslim means to identify with this sacred story, seeing the revelation that God gave through Muhammad in the Quran as the final truth for all human society, and looking to the model of Muhammad and his companions for guidance in living the full human life.

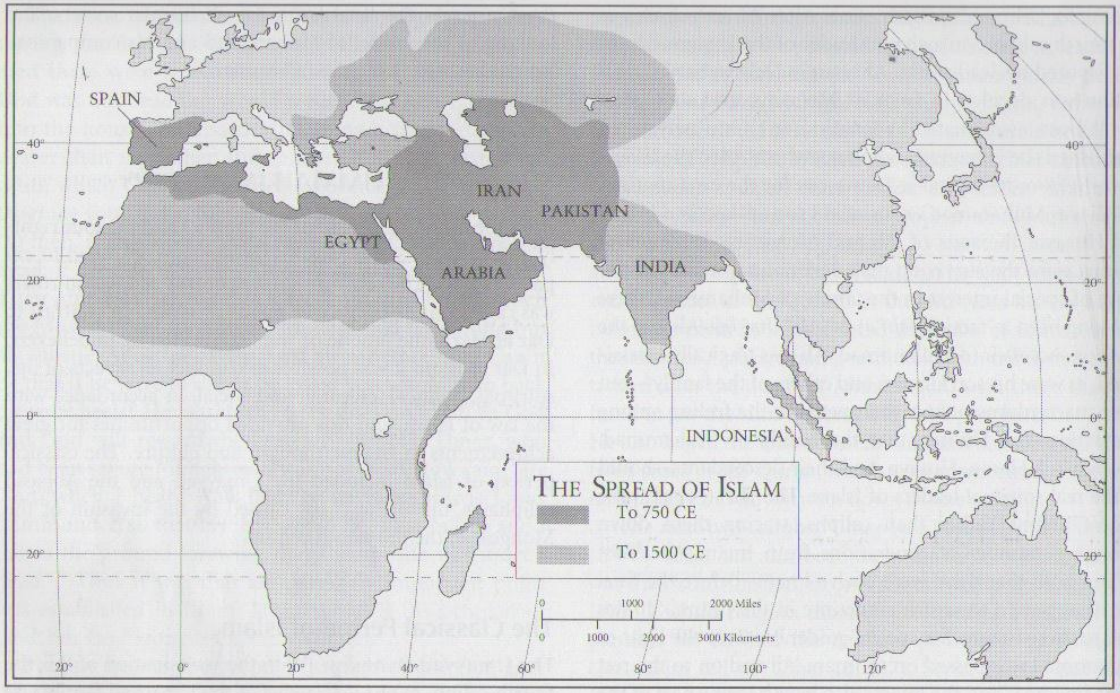
THE ISLAMIC UMMAH IN HISTORY

After the founding period of the prophet and the four rightly guided caliphs, the Muslim movement continued to expand rapidly. The territory under control of Muslim rulers was called **Dar al-Islam**, the "abode of Islam," in contrast to **Dar al-Harb**, the "abode of war" controlled by unbelievers. In Dar al-Islam it was possible to conduct all aspects of life, spiritual, political, cultural, and social, in accordance with the law of Islam, and this provided opportunities for great achievements in Islamic thought and culture. The classical period of Islam included the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphates, up to the chaos caused by the invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

The Classical Period of Islam

The Umayyad Dynasty With the assassination of 'Ali, the fourth caliph, in 661, Mu'awiya of the Umayyad family was able to gain consensus throughout the Muslim world for his caliphate, establishing a family dynasty centered in Damascus. There was a brief challenge to Umayyad rule in 680 posed by the revolt of Husayn, 'Ali's younger son, but this was put down ruthlessly in a great massacre at Karbalah in Iraq. Although this gave the Shi'ites a rallying point and helped establish the permanent existence of the Shi'ite movement within Islam, effective political resistance to rule by the Umayyad family was stopped for the time being.

Mu'awiya was a brilliant leader at Damascus, ruling consensually as the first shaykh among shaykhs. The Umayyad rulers called themselves caliphs, even though later Muslim historians sometimes refer to this dynasty as the "Arab kingdom," implying that the Umayyad dynasty was more like an oriental kingdom than deputies of Muhammad. Under the Umayyads, Islam continued its rapid expansion all the way across northern Africa and up into Spain. The Islamic tide even crossed the Pyrenees into France, turned back finally by Charles Martel at Poitiers in 732. Expansion



also continued eastward in central Asia up to the borders of India. Islamic art and architecture entered into a creative phase; an outstanding artistic achievement was the building of the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem by 'Abd al-Malik (691).

The Abbasid Dynasty: Golden Age of Islam As Islam expanded, the numbers of mawali (non-Arabs "adopted" into Islam) who joined the ummah rapidly increased. These mawali found themselves in a kind of second-class status under the Umayyads; for that reason, many of them were attracted toward the more egalitarian policies of the Shi'ites. Finally, a group of Arabs from Khurasan in the northeast rallied the opposition to the Umayyads. Calling themselves **Abbasids**, after Muhammad's paternal uncle al-'Abbas, they proposed restoring rule to caliphs who were of the house of the prophet—thus attracting the support of the Shi'ites. The mawali also joined them, their army including many soldiers from Iran.

The Abbasid rulers brought Islam to its golden age. It was multicultural and international, and scholarship, literature, and the arts flourished as never before. Shortly after taking rule in about 750, the Abbasids removed the capital to a new Madinat al-Salam (City of Peace) on the Tigris River called Baghdad. There the caliphs ruled much in the style of Persian oriental kings, enjoying such titles as "the Presence" and "the Caliph of God." The fabulous culture of Baghdad under these caliphs is reflected in some of the stories of the *Arabian Nights*, at the time of the famous caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809). Baghdad society here seems worlds away from the Arabic culture of the Quran. In Baghdad the caliph of God had absolute power of life and death. It is said that officials going into the inner rooms of the Presence routinely carried their shroud on their arms in case they should displease the caliph and meet instantaneous execution. Here were viziers (ministers) with lavish palaces, poets, slaves, eunuchs and harems, exotic travel, and great wealth and luxury.

Important for Islamic history was the surge of scholarship that took place under the Abbasids. A great library was built in Baghdad, and scholars translated Greek and Syriac works into Arabic. Now Aristotle and Plato became known to Muslim scholars, and they turned their attention to questions of reason and revelation and of divine power and human will. Muslim culture and learning flourished in other areas as well. In Muslim Spain, with its capital at Cordova, a rival caliphate ruled, a remnant of the Umayyad family, under which a brilliant Islamic scholarly culture was cultivated. And in Egypt a Shi'ite dynasty managed to establish itself as another rival to the Abbasids. Calling themselves Fatimids (after Fatima, daughter of Muhammad and wife of 'Ali), they founded the city of Cairo and established the famous university Al-Azhar.

The classical golden age of Islam came to an end with the difficulties in the Abbasid realm in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Turkish tribes from central Asia surged into Iran and Iraq and gradually assumed power. In Baghdad, the new Turkish leader, the "Prince of Princes," took over real power and the caliph became merely a figurehead. When the Seljuk Turks became dominant in Palestine and threatened Christian pilgrimage access to Jerusalem, Christian leaders of Europe initiated the crusades to drive the Muslim infidels from the Holy Land. Jerusalem fell to the crusaders in 1099, although it was recaptured in 1187 by Salah-al-Din (Saladin). The end of the classical period of Islam was signaled by the eruption of the Mongols into the Islamic lands in the thirteenth century. In 1258, the Mongols attacked Baghdad, burning it to the ground and executing the last caliph. For a couple of centuries Muslim rule was in disarray, until new dynasties established themselves in various parts of the Muslim world.

Development of Shari'ah (Law) and Theology This golden age of Islam under the Umayyads and the Abbasids proved very fruitful in religious and cultural expressions. It produced brilliant new discoveries of science and established the canons of Islamic art, as calligraphy, architecture, and poetry flourished. Most important developments came in the systematic working out of Islamic law, the **Shari'ah**, and in the creation of *kalam*, rational theology.

Since the Quran is understood as God's perfect and final guidance, from early on, Muslims attended to the question of how to apply it to every aspect of life. The example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet himself, as reported in the Hadith, provided the primary sources for interpreting the law of the Quran. In the centuries following Muhammad, these *hadiths* were assembled and evaluated, and scholars were hard at work formulating the Islamic Law, striving (**ijtihad**) to work out applications to all areas of life.

Since this process took place in different localities, the shape of the Shari'ah differed slightly from place to place. Eventually four schools of law emerged among the Sunni Muslims: the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools. There are no fundamental differences between them, and each regards the others as fully orthodox. The Shi'ites developed three schools of their own, the most prominent one being the Ja'fari. Shi'ite law shares its main aspects with Sunnite law, differing principally in the conception of divine authority, which comes through the imam, the perfect leader and successor Muhammad.

The development of the law in Islam was the culmination of the fundamental Quranic principle that all of life is governed by God's decrees. Although the law was organized and systematized by the legal scholars, it was not created by them. It grew out of the ummah's striving to bring all aspects of life into accordance with God's design. By the tenth century most of this legal design was fixed, at least in Sunnite Islam, and the principal function of the legal scholars changed from formulating law to passing on the decisions of the past. This fixation of the law was known as the "closing of the gate of ijtihad," and from then down to the modern era scholars have passed on the legal formulations of the past. Shi'ite scholars, with their conception of divine guidance from the imam, have generally not considered the gate of ijtihad to be closed.

At first, disputes about faith in Islam were settled simply by appeal to the Quran itself or to the testimony of the Prophet's companions. Increasing contact with Greek philosophical thought during the classical period opened new possibilities of exploring the basic doctrines of faith and drawing further implications from them.

There were some early disputes about how to understand certain points of faith. The relation between believing in God and performing the required actions—between faith and works—was interpreted in a radical way by the **Kharijites**. They rejected the idea that a grave sinner could still be considered a believer. They taught a perfectionist ethic and ruthlessly purged their own community of those guilty of grave sins. It was some radical Kharijites who assassinated Caliph 'Ali because he did not take a firm stand

in God's cause against Mu'awiya. The view that prevailed among Muslims, however, was that judgment about sinners should be suspended and left to God, thus avoiding the wrenching of the Muslim community that would be caused by the constant searching out and punishing of those guilty of sinning.

Another early doctrinal discussion concerned human freedom and divine predestination. Those who emphasized free will came to be known as Qadarites (those who discuss determination), holding that humans have the power and capability to act and, thus, should be held responsible for their actions. The Qadarites (like the earlier Kharijites) tended to oppose the Umayyad dynasty, which they held was not according to God's decree but a result of the misuse of human freedom. In reaction, the Umayyad supporters took a more deterministic stand, insisting that God had decreed the Umayyads to rule as caliphs. The prevailing view that matured in Islam stood strongly on the side of divine predestination, putting more emphasis on the unity and almighty character of God than on human freedom.

In spite of these controversies, a spirit of tolerance developed concerning the boundaries of the ummah. Diverse and dissident groups generally were considered part of the ummah, as long as they believed in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, performed the prayer, and fulfilled the requirement of sharing wealth.

Although the earlier controversies were settled in a kind of ad hoc fashion, with the overall welfare of the ummah in mind, the intellectual climate heightened during the Abbasid period. Now Muslims were spread across Asia, northern Africa, and Spain, and they came into direct contact with Greek philosophical thought. The need became urgent for more rational, systematic expressions of the faith.

One group that used philosophic argumentation in developing rational theology (*kalam*) was the **Mu'tazilite** movement. The Mu'tazilites (withdrawers) got their name by "withdrawing" to an intermediate position on the question of whether believers can commit grave sins. But they went on to apply rational speculation to questions about revelation, the nature of God, and divine justice.

In some respects, the Mu'tazilites were conservative orthodox thinkers; they held firmly to two basic Islamic beliefs: the unity of God and absolute divine justice. With rigorous logic they attacked some questionable popular ideas. For example, most traditional Muslims interpreted the Quran literally even when it described God in anthropomorphic (humanlike) terms, such as God sitting on a throne, people seeing God's face in the resurrection, and so forth. The Mu'tazilites, holding tenaciously to the unity of God, insisted that such ideas were only metaphors and were not to be taken literally—God cannot be described in terms of human qualities.

Furthermore, Muslims traditionally said that the Quran was eternal and uncreated. But the Mu'tazilites argued that this could not be so; such a view would amount to **shirk**, associating another eternal divine essence with God. The Quran, they said, is not divine and eternal but was created in time by God to give guidance to humans.

The Mu'tazilites also felt compelled to defend God's justice by declaring that God's predetermination is not absolute; humans have freedom to choose between good and evil. It would be accusing God of gross injustice to say that people are punished or rewarded for actions that God had predetermined!

Mu'tazilite thought flourished for a century before being pushed aside by more traditional positions, but in the process it stimulated the further development of rational theology. Orthodox Sunni thinkers worked with reason and logic to meet the Mu'tazilite challenge, up to the limits of human reason, while remaining in submission to the authority of revelation. The great theologian al-Ash'ari (d. ca. 935) combined reason and revelation in a way that has found acceptance by orthodox Muslims. He held that when the Quran speaks of God in human terms, such as describing God's hand, this was to be accepted as accurate, even though the mode in which God possesses this quality is unknown to humans. Believers accept this truth literally, "without asking how and without likening [to humans]."

The Quran, al-Ash'ari and other orthodox thinkers held, is eternal. But a set of distinctions exists between the eternal attributes of God's word and the physical written or recited Quran, which is created. As to divine determinism and human free will, they argued that God indeed causes all events in the universe; but not being limited by the divine law, God is beyond ideas of evil and injustice. Although God causes all things, humans through their actions "acquire" responsibility for them. By such argumentation the orthodox theologians used reason and turned it against the Mu'tazilites.

Even after the defeat of the Mu'tazilites, Muslim thinkers continued to try to square Islamic faith with

Greek philosophy (*falsafa*). One such philosopher was Ibn Sina (d. 1037), widely known in the West as Avicenna. But the theologian-mystic **al-Ghazali** (1058–1111), one of the greatest thinkers in the history of Islam, blasted such dependence on reason with his book, *The Confusion of the Philosophers*. Some Muslim intellectuals continued to work with rational speculation, like Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), known in the West as Averroes. Against al-Ghazali's attack he defended rational theology with his book, *The Confusion of the Confusion*. But generally orthodox theology backed off from speculative philosophy, even while keeping the method of Aristotelean logic. In fact, the greatest impact of thinkers such as Avicenna and Averroes was on Jewish and Christian thinkers such as Maimonides and Aquinas. Islamic theology, like Islamic law, solidified in orthodox form, to remain largely unchanged until the modern era.

Islamic Mysticism: The Sufis At the same time that Islamic legal scholars were solidifying the law and Greek philosophy was having strong influence on Muslim thinkers, other Muslims were being attracted to mysticism—the interior contemplation and experience of union with God. Like similar developments in Judaism and Christianity, the mystical movement in Islam came to clash with orthodox beliefs and practices.

Sufism, as the Islamic mystical movement is generally called, began as an ascetic movement. The Umayyad and Abbasid rulers had made the house of Islam into "the Arab Kingdom," with the lure of wealth and power too much for many to resist. In reaction, some Muslims went back to the model of Muhammad and the four rightly guided caliphs, who lived lives of honesty and simplicity in their devotion to God. In spite of his great authority, Muhammad had a very frugal lifestyle; 'Umar's shabby garments were legendary; and 'Ali gave away everything to the point of poverty for himself. The Muslim ascetics who distanced themselves from sensuous life and luxury took coarse woolen garments as their symbol, probably receiving the name **Sufi** from the Arabic word *suf* (wool). Since they aspired to a life of poverty, the term *faqir* (poor one) was also used to refer to them.

The Sufi movement soon incorporated additional elements. The legal discussions of the day focused on outer conformity to the Islamic law—but what about inner emotional submission to God in love? Love (*mahabbah*) became a central theme for the mystics. The rationalists strove for intellectual knowledge of God—what about interior, contemplative, experiential knowledge? Such interior knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) likewise became a central theme for the Sufis.

The Sufis looked to evidences in the Quran and Hadith for their emphasis on love and inner union with God. God is our friend, who will have a people He loves, and who love Him (5:57–59). God is nearer to us than the jugular vein (50:16); and wherever we turn, there is the Face of God (2:115). Muhammad was the intimate friend of God, having his consciousness transformed through long vigils, contemplations, and direct revelations from God. His night journey to heaven and his face-to-face communion with God were seen as a mystical paradigm that could be repeated in the Sufi path. In their interpretation of the Quran, the Sufis used, in addition to the literal meaning, also an allegorical and symbolic meaning that guided their mystical practices.

The emphasis on love of God can be seen, for example, in the poetry of the great woman Sufi saint, Rabi'ah (d. 801), who lived a life of rapture and joy amid her austerities. She expressed her mystical thirst for God in a prayer: "O God, if I worship thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, grudge me not Thy everlasting beauty." A famous poem defines the kind of love she had for God:

> I have loved Thee with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is worthy (of Thee).
> As for the love that is selfish, I occupy myself therein with remembrance of Thee to the exclusion of all others.
> As for that which is worthy of Thee, therein Thou raisest the veil that I may see Thee.[9]

Sufis felt that, whereas other Muslims follow the Shari'ah as the outer path to God, there was also an inner way beyond the outer path, and they called this the Tariqa. The Sufi path begins by following the outer path in order to break attachment to earthly things. But at its higher levels the Tariqa becomes a way of inner meditation, leading finally to freedom from attachment to self and a "passing away" (*fana*) into God. The method of the inner path involves techniques of **dhikr**, the "remembering" of God that

the Quran says should be often done (33:41). By remembering God both aloud and silently in the heart, Sufis advanced on the inner path through the "stations" and "states" of spiritual attainment toward inner knowledge and experience of union with God.

Some Sufis became so intoxicated with the inner path that clashes with orthodox teaching set in. One group of Sufis felt themselves beyond the Shari'ah to the point where they could willfully reject and transgress the law. Some Sufis focused on achieving the intoxicating union with God at any cost. An early Sufi, Abu Yazid (d. 875), experienced God deeply in his soul and shocked orthodox Muslims by exclaiming, "Glory to Me! How great is My Majesty!" Another intoxicated mystic, still controversial among Muslims to this day, was al-Hallaj (d. 922). He had a deep knowledge of Christianity, in addition to Hinduism and Buddhism. Al-Hallaj described the mystical union with God by the famous allegory of a moth that circles ever closer to the candle's flame and is finally united with it by being consumed by it—an allegory of the soul and God. He bothered orthodox Muslims especially by his public pronouncements of his experience of union with God, such as his famous utterance, *ana al-Haqq* (I am the Truth, i.e., God). Refusing to take back such a blasphemous statement, al-Hallaj accepted death so as to be one with God. Taken to be crucified, al-Hallaj approached the gallows laughing, thanking God for showing him the mysterious vision of God's face. Perhaps knowing his resemblance to Jesus, al-Hallaj prayed:

> And these Thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for Thy Religion, longing to win Thy favor, forgive them, Lord. Have mercy on them. Surely if Thou hadst shown them what Thou hast shown me, they would never have done what they have done. . . . Whatsoever Thou dost will, I praise Thee![10]

In later centuries some Muslims have pointed out that al-Hallaj, in saying *ana al-Haqq*, was surrendering his own existence and testifying that God is all. Yet his public flaunting of his mystical experiences gave offense to many Muslims.

Al-Ghazali and the Acceptance of Sufism In the radical mysticism of Sufis such as al-Hallaj, the Sufi Tariqa seemed to have become incompatible with the orthodox Shari'ah. But in the experience and teaching of the great al-Ghazali (1058–1111), a reconciliation was effected between the Sufi way and the orthodox law, making it possible for Sufism to become thought of as the "heartbeat of Islam." Al-Ghazali lived as the Muslim ummah was approaching its five hundredth anniversary (he died in the year 505 of the Hijrah), and his life of devotion and work of renewal have led many to consider him the second greatest Muslim after Muhammad. At thirty-three years of age he started teaching in the new Islamic institute in Baghdad, becoming a master of rational theology and philosophy. But a spiritual crisis affected him, as he realized he was mired in his comfortable and rewarding position. In his spiritual autobiography, *Deliverance from Error*, he wrote:

> I considered the circumstances of my life, and realized that I was caught in a veritable thicket of attachments. I also considered my activities, of which the best was my teaching and lecturing, and realized that in them I was dealing with sciences that were unimportant and contributed nothing to the attainment of eternal life. After that I examined my motive in my work of teaching, and realized that it was not a pure desire for the things of God, but that the impulse moving me was the desire for an influential position and public recognition. . . . One day I would form the resolution to quit Baghdad and get rid of these adverse circumstances; the next day I would abandon my resolution. I put one foot forward and drew the other back. . . . Worldly desires were striving to keep me by their chains just where I was, while the voice of faith was calling, "To the road! To the road!"[11]

Falling into a physical ailment in which he could barely eat and could not talk, al-Ghazali finally took to the road and lived as a Sufi for the next eleven years in Syria, Palestine, and Arabia. Eventually he returned to teaching for a while, and then he founded a Sufi retreat center in his native Persia. In his many works he was able to bring about a synthesis between Sufism and the orthodox tradition of law and theology. He lived by the law, but he provided for it a deep spiritual sensitivity. In his teaching and especially in his own example, he brought Sufism back into the orthodox Islamic path.

Sufi membership, which before al-Ghazali had been small, elite groups, now became more representative of all levels of society. Following al-Ghazali's example, other orders or brotherhoods were established. Each was based on a spiritual master (*shaykh*) who had perfected a distinctive path or Tariqa and gathered disciples around himself. The disciples (*faqirs*) lived with the master and practiced the

path communally. Among the distinctive practices of the different brotherhoods were chanting of certain divine phrases, breath control while chanting, communal recitation, ecstatic dancing, and the like.

One particularly well-known Sufi brotherhood was founded by the great Sufi poet, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273). Rumi, born in Afghanistan, moved to Anatolia and became a master of Sufism. An intense friendship that ended in a tragic death inspired him to put his deep love for God into poetry—and the result is some of the most inspired Sufi poetry of all time. Rumi founded the order of the Mawlawiya, often called the "whirling dervishes" because of their distinctive ecstatic dance: With the shaykh in the center, the dancers with flowing robes spin and circle around to the accompaniment of plaintive music.

A Sufi thinker who went far beyond the bounds set by al-Ghazali but who had much influence on Islamic thinkers was Ibn 'Arabi of Spain (1165–1240). Trained in all the religious sciences, Ibn 'Arabi focused on the twin points of unity of being and love. Feeling his thinking led by an inner light from God, he taught that all created things are manifestations of God—external to God but having emanated from the divine mind. In stressing the unity of being, Ibn 'Arabi also exalted the feminine principle, declaring that to see God in woman is more perfect than seeing the divine one in any other form. Love was at the heart of his vision of the universe, and on that basis he was tolerant of all religions as reflections of the unity of being.

Religious Ideas of the Shi'ites During the classical period, the one major division in the worldwide Islamic community developed: the Shi'a movement, which today comprises about 15 percent of the world population of Muslims. The split between the Shi'ites and the Sunnites (the orthodox Muslims) began as a political division but later led to some divergent religious emphases.

From the time of Muhammad's death there had existed a *Shi'at 'Ali*, a "faction of 'Ali" who thought Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali was destined to be the successor of Muhammad. Although 'Ali was passed over in the choice of the first three caliphs and died tragically after his brief frustrated time as fourth caliph, his followers continued to hold that he and his descendants were the proper successors to Muhammad in God's design. 'Ali had married Muhammad's daughter Fatima; their sons Hasan and Husayn were the male descendants of Muhammad—and the Shi'ites felt that the successors of Muhammad should come from the "people of the house," that is, Muhammad's house. Shi'ites report *hadiths*, which indicate that Muhammad did at various times indicate that 'Ali and the "people of the house" were to be his successors. A particularly significant incident took place at the pool of Ghadir al-Khumm as Muhammad was on his way back to Medina from his farewell pilgrimage. There, before the assembled Muslims, Muhammad publicly designated 'Ali as his successor, according to the Shi'ites, saying that whoever has Muhammad as his master has 'Ali as his master.[12] Whereas Sunnites hold that this incident simply shows the affection Muhammad had for 'Ali, Shi'ites see it as proof that 'Ali is the divinely designated imam or successor of Muhammad. Yet 'Ali, sensing the importance of maintaining the unity of the ummah, did not press the claim when the first three caliphs were chosen, and his own delayed and brief rule as caliph was marked by division and tragedy.

After 'Ali's death and Mu'awiya's takeover of the caliphate for the Umayyad family, 'Ali's son Hasan gave up any claim as successor of Muhammad. But in 680, 'Ali's younger son Husayn put forth the claim to be the rightful successor. On his way to Iraq where he had many supporters, Husayn and his whole family were ambushed at Karbalah; the men were massacred and the women taken in chains to Damascus. But what appeared to be a great defeat became a religious rallying point for the Shi'ites. They interpreted Husayn's death as a martyrdom in God's cause, showing that God provides blessings through the sufferings of the people of the prophet's house. Muhammad's own death, the death of his infant sons, the death of the youthful Fatima, 'Ali's assassination, Hasan's death by poisoning, Husayn's martyrdom at Karbalah, plus the tragic deaths of succeeding imams, all show God's redemptive design. Annually on the tenth of Muharram, Shi'ites remember the massacre at Karbalah with processions, passion plays, and intensified spiritual discipline.

Besides their view of the proper successor of Muhammad and their inclination to view the suffering and deaths of the imams as having deep spiritual meaning, the Shi'ites differed with the Sunnites in a number of ways. Sunnites viewed the caliphate in a contractual way, the caliph ruling by consensus as the deputy of Muhammad. But the Shi'ites

developed a more vertical, intrinsicalist view of the imamate: The highest spiritual authority of Muhammad was passed on to 'Ali and then to each of the succeeding imams. Just as Muhammad was kept sinless and perfect, so also the imams, possessing the "light of Muhammad," are kept by God from error in interpreting God's revelation. All true interpretation, therefore, comes from the imam, not from the consensus of other scholars.

Furthermore, Shi'ites held the idea of the **hidden imam**. In their view, the twelfth imam Muhammad disappeared and went into a state of hiding or occultation (*ghaybah*), from which he will return one day to destroy evil and establish a new perfect age of Islam. Meanwhile, this hidden imam illumines and guides the religious scholars (*mujtahids*) as they interpret the Quran and establish law for Muslims. The largest group of Shi'ites accepts this idea about the twelfth imam, earning thereby the name **Twelvers** (*Ithna 'Ashariyah*). The Twelvers became dominant in Iran during the sixteenth century and still today make up the vast majority of Muslims in Iran, with large numbers also in Iraq.

A smaller group differs from the Twelvers on the identity of the fourth imam, holding him to be Zayd, a grandson of Husayn; the Zaydis, living in Yemen today, are very close to Sunnites in their practices. Still another group claims the proper seventh imam was Isma'il; since they consider him to be the last imam, the Isma'ilites are often called Seveners. From the Isma'ilites have come some splinter groups of a more radical nature, such as the order of the Assassins, who used the art of the dagger, combined with taking hashish, to accomplish their purposes. Small groups stemming from the Isma'ilites, such as the Druze of Lebanon and the 'Alawites of Syria, developed radical, secretive teachings and practices to the extent that many other Muslims no longer recognize them within Islam.

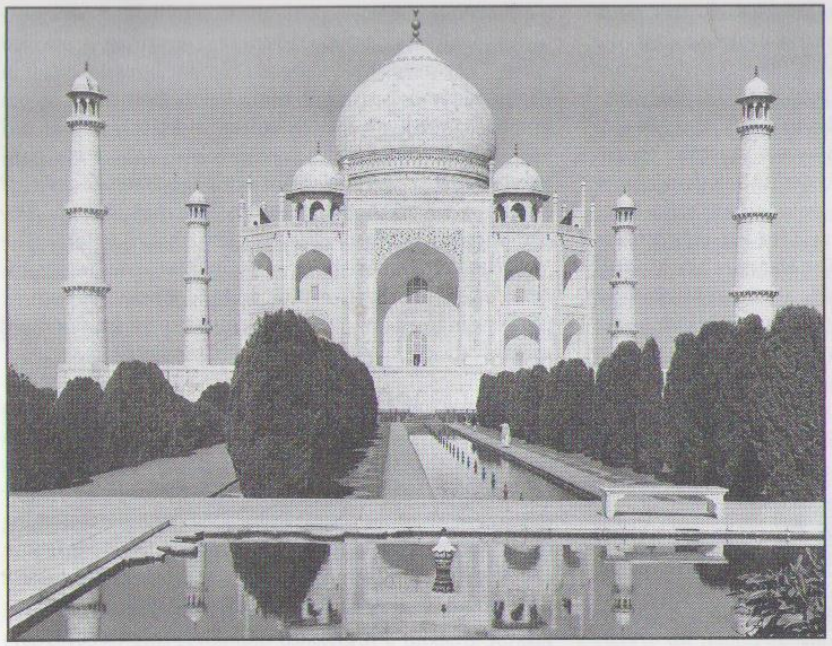
It should be emphasized that the Shi'ites agree with the Sunnites on all the major points of Islamic faith and practice, with the exceptions noted here. They have their own schools of law.

Medieval Empires: Stability and Flourishing Muslim Culture

After the disruptions caused by the Mongol invasions, eventually new Muslim empires were established in the sixteenth century to restore some order and stability in the Muslim world. And they succeeded well. Spread abroad especially by traders and Sufi brotherhoods, Muslim civilization was extended through much of the world by a whole series of dynamic sultanates. Eventually these sultanates developed into three empires that were especially important: the **Safavid** Empire in Iran, the **Mughal** Empire in India, and the **Ottoman** Turkish Empire bridging western Asia, northern Africa, and eastern Europe.

From the fifteenth century on, the West was moving into the Renaissance, followed by the great explorations and discoveries, the rise of science, and the Enlightenment. But most of this bypassed Islam. The Muslim world, having had its golden age earlier, entered into a period of stagnation and retreat. Although the disruption caused by the Mongols was overcome in the new Muslim empires, the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment did not reach into Muslim society until the Western powers began to encroach upon Muslim lands in the nineteenth century. Still, there was continued expansion of Muslim rule, both into eastern Europe and into all of India. And although modernity did not emerge, there was a great flourishing of traditional Muslim culture in the Middle East, India, and the Malaysian-Indonesian archipelago. In fact, areas under Muslim rule had never been greater than during the medieval empires.

Late in the thirteenth century, the Turk Osman (d. 1326) is said to have founded the Osmali or Ottoman dynasty in Asia Minor. The Ottomans reconquered most of the old area of the Islamic ummah, subjugating the smaller Muslim principalities and taking over guardianship of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. They combined the traditional Mongol-Turkish warrior heritage with the Islamic missionary impulse, setting themselves forth as the defenders and propagators of Islam. Before long they also made deep inroads into Christian Europe: In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II, and by 1550 the Ottomans controlled the Balkans, most of Hungary, and parts of southern Russia. Some of the panic of European Christianity at the time of the Reformation reflects this surge of Islam. Yet Christian communities generally fared well in Turkish Muslim lands, and Jews fleeing persecution in Europe found safe haven under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman caliphate was proclaimed in 1517 as the supposed head of the Muslim ummah, and it continued, with a long period of decline, until it was terminated by the Turkish people themselves in 1924.



The Taj Mahal, a grand Muslim building from the Mughal period in India.

Some have felt that the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent (1520–1566) was the most glorious in all the annals of Islam. He was a great warrior and statesman, effected a massive codification of law, built many architectural glories throughout Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), and promoted music, poetry, and the arts at his lavish court. Religious scholars (*'ulama*) played a very important role in the Sunnite Ottoman Empire with its close fusion of religion and state, but they lost their independent standing and became a clerical bureaucracy within the Ottoman system.

East of the Ottomans, a new empire came into being in Iran (Persia). The Safavids had been a Sufi brotherhood working for the purifying of Islam, eventually taking on Shi'ite messianic aspirations and engaging in armed struggle. In 1501, Shah Ismail (1487–1524), head of the Safavid family, invaded and occupied Tabriz, proclaiming himself shah of Iran and setting up the Safavid dynasty. He claimed to be a descendant of the twelfth imam, a divinely guided reformer, and he forged a new religious-political identity for Iran with Shi'ism as the religion of the realm, and it has remained so in Iran down to the present.

Among the great cultural achievements of the shahs of Iran was the capital city Isfahan, created by Shah 'Abbas (r. 1588–1629), most famous of the Safavid sultans. Full of beautiful gardens, monuments, mosques, and Islamic schools, Isfahan attracted travelers and Muslim scholars from all over the world.

As early as the tenth century, Muslim warriors invaded India, and the sultanate of Delhi was set up to control northern India. These first Muslim invaders looked upon Hindus and Buddhists as polytheists, with their elaborate temples and devotion to gods, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas. So they looted the temples and destroyed the monasteries.

The Mongols were converted to Islam, and early in the sixteenth century an army led by Babur (d. 1530), a descendant of Genghis Khan, invaded India and founded the Mughal Empire in northern India. The famous ruler Akbar (r. 1556–1605), grandson of Babur, extended his rule to include most of India. Akbar was a Muslim, but he developed a very tolerant attitude toward Hindus, marrying two Hindu princesses and revoking all Muslim laws that discriminated against them. He set up a policy of universal religious toleration and encouraged discussions at his court between Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jains, and even Christians. Eventually, in the second half of his reign, Akbar tried to establish a new religion, the Divine Wisdom, a kind of synthesis of all these religions.

But Akbar's successors recognized that Akbar had gone beyond the boundaries of Islam, so they restored the Muslim faith. One of these successors, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), achieved enduring fame by building the Taj Mahal as a crowning glory of Islamic art. But Mughal power disintegrated rapidly, and when British forces

became dominant in the eighteenth century they took over effective administration of its remnants. At the time when political unity was disintegrating, a Sufi leader, Shah Wali Allah (1703–1762), founded a Muslim revival movement, which sought to unify the Muslim community and revitalize its religious practice. He attempted to revive early forms of Islamic belief and practice rather than simply relying on the four schools of law. He even translated the Quran into Persian to make it more available to the people. The legacy of the Mughal Empire in India is the largest single group of Muslims in the world—now divided in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Reform Movements and the Modern World

While Islamic society was flourishing in traditional modes in these wide-flung empires, in Europe dramatic changes in learning, science, and technology were taking place. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the forces of European colonization were felt on all sides, and Islam was pushed and shoved into the modern era with all its religious problems and opportunities.

The Wahhabi Reform Movement Just as the first rumblings of Western intervention were striking the Ottomans, a different kind of challenge erupted from central Arabia. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) founded a reform movement that attempted to purify Islam of centuries-long accumulations of beliefs and practices, returning to the original purity of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The reform movement was premodern in that it was not a protest against traditionalism in the name of modernity, nor was it a reaction against modernization. The Wahhabis were traditionalists who attacked innovations like those of the rationalistic and esoteric interpretations of the Quran, the Sufi blurring of the distinction between God and humans, the cult of saints that had developed, and the like. They held that the clear words of the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet should be literally understood as direct guidance for life. The Wahhabis destroyed tombs and shrines dedicated to saints, and they initiated religious education and enforced Islamic morality.

The Wahhabi movement spread rapidly and became a highly disciplined group of Muslims practicing a purified Islam. They struck up an alliance with the house of Sa'ud in Arabia and managed to gain control of the holy city of Mecca in 1806. Although the Ottomans eventually recaptured Mecca, a century later the Sa'ud family succeeded in reconquering Arabia, and they reinstituted the Wahhabi policies. Still today the Wahhabi influence is dominant in Saudi Arabia, where a strict form of Islamic law remains in force. The Wahhabis also provided a strong stimulus to Muslim reform outside Arabia. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Muslims in India and West Africa moved with the same zeal to purify the dominant Muslim establishments.

Challenge from Western Culture and Muslim Response As the Western world moved gradually into the modern era, the Muslim sultanates were overpowered by new Western advances in naval power, the steam engine, and other developments of the scientific age. The symbolic beginning of the modern period in the Islamic world was in about 1800, when Napoleon and his forces came to Egypt and opened this Muslim land up to Western dominance and exploitation. The same pattern was followed in other Muslim lands throughout the nineteenth century and even up to the mid-twentieth century. The Dutch took control of Indonesia, the British ruled Malaya, Russia moved into central Asia, Iran was divided between the British and the Russians, and North Africa became a group of European colonies. In 1876, the British Christian Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India!

Such events shook the Muslim world deeply, bringing both a loss of independence and a loss of confidence in the face of the modern achievements of the West. The pattern of Muslim rule in the various empires that had evolved in the medieval period no longer was viable. One of the first responses to the onslaught of the modern era was a new nationalism in some of the Muslim lands.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman Empire was in the process of disintegrating. People of the Balkans expelled their Muslim overlords and created independent nations. As the world lurched into World War I, the Ottomans took the side of the Central Powers. With British encouragement, this provided the chance for the Hashemite Arabs of the Hejaz, under the leadership of Husayn ibn 'Ali, to revolt against their hated Turkish over-

lords. The British guaranteed the Arabs autonomy once the war was ended, but after the war the British and French retained mandates over most of the Arab lands in the Middle East. Husayn's sons were appointed hereditary rulers of Iraq and Transjordon. But Britain reserved Palestine with the intent of creating a homeland for the Jews in accord with the secret Balfour Declaration of 1917—a policy the Arabs considered a betrayal by the British. The Hashemite leader Husayn ibn 'Ali was driven out of the Hejaz by the Sa'udis, who established the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Under pressure from the rapidly increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine, Arab nationalism rose to a high pitch. However, the divisions in the Arab world were such that Arab nationalism did not result in unified actions or goals. The complicated Arab–Israeli political conflicts have spilled over into tensions between Muslims and Jews.

Nationalism prevailed also in Turkey—but of a different sort. The last effective ruler of the Ottoman Empire, al-Hamid II (r. 1876–1909), had tried to reassert his role as true caliph for all the Muslim world. But the defeat suffered in World War I, and the threatened dismemberment of the Turkish homeland, created a nationalist revolution led by Mustafa Kemal (1881–1939). This revolution ushered in a modern Turkish state and a national identity based on distinctively Turkish culture, history, and language. Islam was included merely as one of the elements of this national identity, and the Ottoman caliphate was declared ended. To throw off the shackles of traditionalism, the Islamic scholars ('ulama) were excluded from any public role, and secular law replaced Islamic law. Religion became a personal, voluntary matter, and women were emancipated from the traditional family codes. The Turkish leaders insisted this was not an antireligious movement but rather a reform of religion; freed from the authority of the religious scholars, men and women could turn to the religion of the Quran to meet their religious needs.

In India, nationalism took the form of an Indo-Muslim movement. Thinkers like Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938), seeing that Muslims in India were faced with being a perpetual minority within a secularized Hindu state, advocated the partitioning of India and the creation of a separate, independent Muslim state. A poet and philosopher of Islam, Iqbal saw Western secular influences as destructive because the West had no spiritual roots in service to God. In order for a Muslim to live life in submission to God, it was necessary to have a Muslim state. At the same time, Iqbal advocated liberal values for society and the creation of an Islamic League of Nations. India was partitioned in 1947, with great suffering and displacement of populations, and the Muslim state of Pakistan was created. Later, East Pakistan rebelled and established the separate state of Bangladesh. For many Indian Muslims, the creation of Pakistan was a great new day for Islam; others regretted it deeply and chose to remain in India.

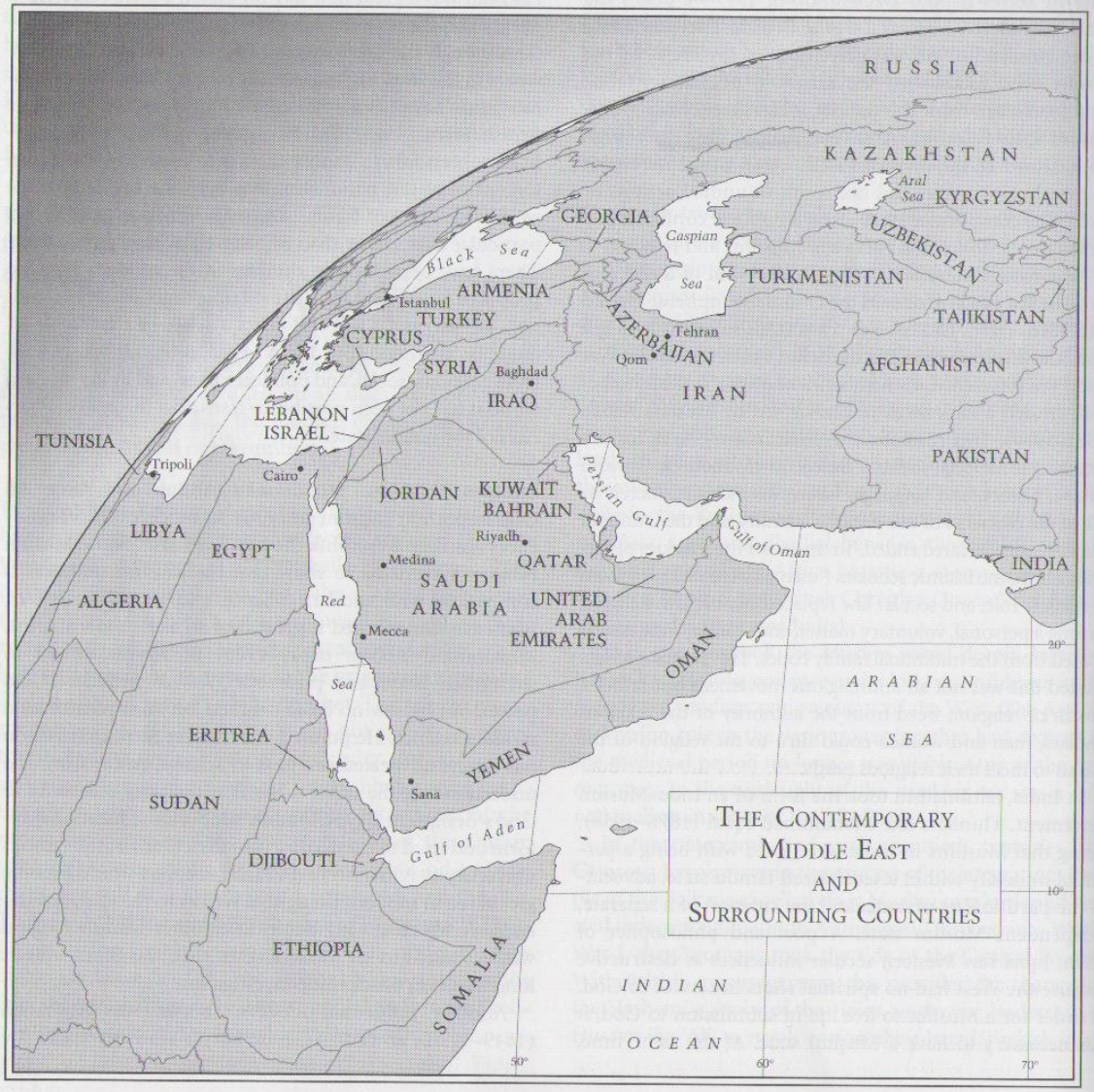
Although the changes have not been so dramatic elsewhere in the world, in the last half century most of the Muslim lands have been restored politically to Muslims. The British, French, and Dutch have gone, and Muslims generally have been free to choose their own method of self-rule. One price of this nationalism has been the breakup of the worldwide unity of Islam. Now a Muslim is a "citizen" of a particular state rather than a "believer" within the ummah. There have been Muslim thinkers in the modern era who proposed and fought for a pan-Islamic unity that transcends nationalism, and there still exists a sense of worldwide Islamic brotherhood. But Islam needs to be fulfilled in concrete religious, social, and political forms; and in the modern world it has not been possible to transcend the political barriers of the nation-state.

Modern Thinkers: Muhammad 'Abduh and Amir 'Ali

One important Muslim response to modernization influences has been to rethink the bases of Islam. Some Muslim thinkers have tried to show that the Muslim tradition is compatible with modern science and progress; in fact, Islam has contributed a great deal to the modern spirit. Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) of Egypt wanted to strengthen Islam and push out Western influences and power, but he saw no basic conflicts between religion and modern science. He pointed out that the Muslim tradition has always advocated progress in science, researching and understanding the natural law that operates according to God's design. In Egypt, 'Abduh supported educational reform and tried to modernize the curriculum of the famous university al-Azhar, so that Islamic scholars would become grounded in modern thought as well as in the religious sciences. In his view, Christianity as an other-worldly religion was less suited to the modern spirit than was Islam with its long tradition of scientific investigation.

Another influential modern thinker was Amir 'Ali (1849–1928), an Indian Shi'ite lawyer who advocated the

goals of the brotherhood of all Muslims, respect for women, and government for the people. In his widely read book, *The Spirit of Islam*, Amir 'Ali portrayed Muhammad as a political liberator for the people of his day, and he asserted that Islam today should return to that kind of vision. Muhammad allowed plural marriage because in the society of his day it was the best way of protecting women from destitution and exploitation, and secluding them was the way of showing them respect. But it is only traditionalism that has rigidly perpetuated these practices in modern times. Amir 'Ali, thus, argued that the Muslim tradition really offers modern people a liberating spiritual base. In the



Muslim women praying during the fasting month of Ramadam.

process, Amir 'Ali interpreted the Quran in the light of its historical context; the laws it prescribes are the best for its day but are not to be considered unchangeable edicts for all time. To many Muslims, however, this is an unacceptable form of modernization.

Muslims in the World Today

Revival and Resurgence of Islam Although many Muslims today live in very secularized societies, the weight of Islamic tradition goes against accepting such secularization of life with all its accompanying effects on the individual and on society. In response to the ever-increasing pervasiveness of secular Western influences in every part of the world, the last few decades have seen new Islamic revival movements. One such revival movement that sometimes has taken a militant stance is the Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in Egypt in 1928, spread to northern Africa, Syria, and Iraq, and continues today as a force in the Muslim world. The Brotherhood holds that all efforts toward modernization have to be purged of their Western influences and adjusted to the pure teaching of Islam. Even modern Islamic regimes should be swept away if they perpetuate a secular society or one that is imperfectly Islamic. The primary nation of Muslims is the ummah, and allegiance cannot be given to Western-style nation-states that do not promote the ummah.

Another example of the revival of Islam to meet the threat of Westernization is the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the 1960s, and 1970s, Shah Reza Pahlavi strongly promoted the modernization of Iran's economy, education, military, and culture. Western-style recreation, consumer goods, and social life prevailed. Women in the cities, for example, went about in short dresses without covering hair or arms. In addition to the shah's rejection of traditional Islamic values and customs, he enforced harsh repressive security measures against his opponents. Finally, in 1978–1979, Shi'ite religious leaders, inspired by the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrew the shah and established an Islamic republic. The constitution of Iran makes it clear that, although it is a modern state with full protection and rights for all its citizens, the fundamental law of the state is Islamic law, and the final authorities in the interpretation of that law are the religious scholars. Iran is perhaps the clearest example of the attempt to wed complete submission to God's law with the demands and opportunities of modern civilization.

There are many other examples of Muslim resurgence throughout the world today. Muslims in Pakistan have attempted to create a Muslim state while still guaranteeing political and religious freedom to non-Muslims. In Nigeria, Muslims are hoping to bring social and political life in their country more in conformity with the Islamic Shari'ah. And Muslims in Indonesia are seeking ways to express their Islamic way of life while maintaining harmony and national unity in their pluralistic society. To many Muslims, in countries across the Muslim world, the Islamic resurgence is an expression of their desire to live in the modern world by drawing on their own Islamic spiritual sources rather than simply accepting Western secular models.

The Islamist Movement and Radical Muslims Muslim societies in the world today are very diverse, with varying ways of combining Islamic beliefs with cultural developments in lands as different as Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, and all the rest. Many Westerners seem to think all Muslims are like the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, but there are in fact many ways of being authentic Muslims in the world today. The vast majority of Muslims in the

world are ordinary Muslims, holding to the essential Muslim beliefs and way of life even as they participate in the ethos of their particular culture. In every Muslim society, there are Muslims who feel the Islamic revival more deeply and make special attempts to display their Muslim identity in their political, economic, and social life, for example, wearing Muslim dress, practicing Islamic banking, and promoting Quranic schools. The last few years have seen increasing numbers of Muslims called *Islamists* in all Muslim countries, those who actively seek to restore true Muslim societies by establishing Islamic governments and the Shari'ah as the rule of law. Often these Islamists are linked with Wahhabi teachers and influence, resulting from efforts of Muslims in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere to assist and educate Muslims worldwide by endowing many mosques and Islamic schools. They particularly want to purify Islam from corrupting secular and Western influences, which they believe have infected their own governments and societies.

In the climate of anxiety about Muslim extremists in our post–9/11/01 world, we need clearly to recognize that the great majority of Islamists do not advocate violence or terrorist actions. Most Islamists follow the Quranic guidance that there is no coercion in religion, and that the establishing of true Islam is achieved by missionary work (**da'wah**), teaching, and political activity. It is also important to see that Islamists have gained ground because of the widespread feeling of political and economic injustice that Muslim societies have been subjected to, both by their own secular governments and from Western domination that supports such injustices. Arising from this fertile ground, a small minority of Islamists have turned to violence and terrorism in the cause of their political struggle, justifying such extreme measures as suicide bombings and killing of innocent people under the notion of *jihad*, holy war. Almost all Muslims reject these terrorists, asserting that the Quran does not allow suicide and killing of innocent people. Yet the continuing sense of injustice and disrespect suffered by Muslims tends to lead some Muslims toward the more extreme Islamist positions.

Islam in the West A new factor in modern Islam is the increasing number of Muslims living in Western societies. There are more than 18 million Muslims in Europe, for example, about half of them in the southeastern regions, with the other half in western parts of Europe. France alone is home to over five million Muslims. And the numbers of Muslims who have immigrated to America or are studying in America have increased dramatically, so that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the Americas. The problems and opportunities of these Muslim communities living in non-Muslim societies have been increasingly discussed by Islamic leaders.

A particularly important Muslim movement in America has been the so-called Black Muslim movement, which has attracted many African Americans. Some of the first Muslims in America were slaves from Africa, although their Islamic identity was suppressed under conditions of slavery. While there were a number of attempts by African Americans to foster Islamic identity, the most prominent and lasting movement was the Nation of Islam, founded by Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975), who was born in Georgia as Elijah Poole. Elijah Muhammad identified himself as the messenger of God, and he founded Nation of Islam communities in many major cities, providing identity, status, and a strict moral way of life for many living in difficult situations in the inner cities. Elijah Muhammad's preaching included a racial mythology that fostered black nationalism and excluded integration with whites. A Nation of Islam leader who moved away from this racial mythology was Malcolm X, founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which supported black nationalism but rejected black separation. Malcolm X was assassinated, but eventually Elijah Muhammad's son, Warith Deen Muhammad, took over leadership of the main Black Muslim group and transformed it into the American Muslim Mission, a nonracist, authentic Islamic community in America. The central organization was dissolved in 1985, and these mosques have forged close links with the other Muslim communities while continuing to serve African Americans of the urban neighborhoods. Another charismatic leader, Louis Farrakhan, broke with Warith Deen Muhammad and revived the Nation of Islam, eloquently denouncing the causes of racism and poverty. But even the Nation of Islam has moved closer to orthodox Islamic practices and has ties with leaders in the Muslim world.

Because of the increasing presence of Muslims in the Western world, and also because of crucial situations involving Muslims and non-Muslims in parts of the world such as Palestine and India, in recent years Muslims have shown an interest in establishing dialogue with people of

other religions, particularly Christians and Jews. Whereas Christians and Jews have been engaging in dialogue for some years, these "trialogues" are fairly new developments. Muslims in the West are increasingly seeing the importance of imparting an authentic understanding of Islamic religion to non-Muslims and creating strategies and opportunities for interfaith cooperation.

Struggles and Hopes of Muslims Today The destructive actions of terrorists, such as Al-Qaeda and other such groups that claim Islamic justification for their deeds, is a source of great anguish for Muslims today. Despite their attempts to show that Islam does not permit such violence, attacks continue and many people are reinforced in their view that Islam is a religion of violence. Because of such terrorist attacks, today in Western countries people are harassed, arrested, and investigated simply because they are Muslim (or Arab, or some other ethnicity that resembles the terrorists) and, thus, somehow believed to be connected with the terrorists. But even in traditional Muslim countries, there are concerns whether one should support the quasi-secular society, or the Islamist proposals for the society, or the radical Muslim activities.

And so there is much soul-searching going on in Muslim communities worldwide today. Not only are there questions regarding the activity of Islamists and radicals, but also there are questions of how Muslims live responsibly in a world of many diverse political systems and religions. The notion of Islam as a total civilization fulfilling God's design in all areas is the Muslim ideal. The question of how this ideal relates to the modern world with nation-states, international alliances, global economic structures, and a plethora of religions is not so easy to answer. Muslim leaders and thinkers continue today to discuss and debate these issues, continuing the early Muslim tradition of *ijtihad*, striving to understanding God's design.

Muslims have taken up the challenge to put forward the positive, peaceful teachings of Islam for today. They have experimented with new ways of living the Muslim way of life in the modern world, such as Islamic banking, educational opportunities, empowerment of women, a renewed interest in Islamic perspectives on science, and dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths. In spite of the difficulties caused by terrorists, Muslims have been striving to show that Islam, like the other Abrahamic religions, is a religion of peace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was cultural and religious life like in Arabia before Muhammad brought the new teachings of Islam?
2. Describe how Muhammad began receiving revelations from God. What was his own reaction? Were there any who believed him?
3. What kind of reaction was there among the people of Mecca when Muhammad began publicly proclaiming his new revelations?
4. Why was the Hijra such an important event that the Muslim calendar dates from it?
5. Discuss Muhammad's relationship with the whole line of prophets sent by God in earlier times. What is the Islamic understanding of the prophet Jesus?
6. What was the role of the caliph? What was accomplished under caliphs 'Umar and 'Uthman?
7. What did the Mu'tazilites argue for, in questions about the Quran, God's attributes, and predestination?
8. What were the Sufis all about? Why was al-Hallaj executed? What was the contribution of al-Ghazali?
9. What were the main Shi'ite religious ideas that differed from those of the Sunnites?
10. What were the three great Muslim empires that flourished beginning in the sixteenth century? Describe some of their achievements.
11. Describe the intent and results of the Wahhabi reform movement.
12. What were the major forms of Muslim revival and renewal during the twentieth century? How would you characterize the Muslim revival movement in the first years of the twenty-first century?
13. What issues, do you think, are of most concern to Muslims today?

Chapter 13

Muslim Worlds of Meaning

ALLAH, LORD OF THE WORLDS

What's it all about? To Muslims, the assertion of the oneness (*tawhid*) of God is the bedrock of all life and truth. The Muslim confession of faith is brief and focused: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." This is called the **Shahadah** (Confession), and it is the basic statement of faith for all Muslims. Reciting this confession with faith and true intention is what makes one a Muslim. These are the first words recited in a baby's ear at birth, and they are the last words on the lips of a dying Muslim. Recited in prayers many times each day, the confession epitomizes the spirit of Islam.

Life Centered in One God

"There is no God but Allah"—*la ilaha illa Allah*. There is no reluctance among Muslims to pronounce the divine term *Allah* (God) such as Jews feel about pronouncing the divine name of Yahweh. Rather, the feeling is that this confession, with its sonorous, liquid syllables, should perpetually be heard. Indeed, the very mention of Allah brings blessings, and so it is the most repeated word in the Muslim vocabulary. Friends are greeted with the name of Allah. After any favorable action a Muslim voices, "Praise be to Allah" (*alhamduli-llah*). Referring to intentions for the future, the Muslim adds, "If Allah wills" (*insha allah*). Every sura of the Quran (except sura 9) begins with the *bismillah*, "In the name of Allah." And in the call to prayers five times every day, and on countless other occasions, the cry goes out, *Allahu akbar*, "God is Greater!"

The Unity of God When Muslims say, "There is no God but Allah," the emphasis is not particularly on the existence of a divine reality or on the name that one calls this divine reality. The Arab tribes of Muhammad's time did not doubt the existence of gods, and they also knew and believed in Allah as the supreme God, the creator. What Muhammad proclaimed that was new and radical was the sole existence of Allah, to the exclusion of any other divine beings. The word *Allah* in Arabic simply means "the God" (*al-ilah*). It is not a personal name known only by devotees of a particular religion, like the name Yahweh or Jesus Christ or Krishna. It is the word universally used in the Arabic language to designate "the God."

What the confession stresses above all is the unity of God, the doctrine of *tawhid*. God is one. Whereas this sounds deceptively simple, to Muslims the whole experience of God is concentrated in these words.

God is one. That means, first of all, that God completely fills up the divine realm to the total exclusion of any other divinity. God cannot be divided into many parts, or even three or two parts. It is not possible for there to be competitors to Allah in the divine realm. There are no associates, no divine helpers or enemies of God. Muslims do believe in the existence of angels, messengers of God who carry out God's will in the world. But these angels are creatures of God, belonging to the created space-time world. Only God is God.

The unity of God further means that God is transcendent, that is, far beyond and separate from the created world. Emphasizing the transcendence of God in stronger tones than do Jews or Christians, Muslims insist on a total separation of the two realms, the divine and the created, with no overlapping and no mixing together. To mix God together with the created realm would be to compromise

God's oneness and uniqueness. It would be to elevate something created to the status of divinity, thus positing a competitor to the one God. The greatest sin, according to the Quran, is *shirk*, associating something else with God. This is the great sin of polytheism, which looks on created things such as sun and moon, mountains and trees, spirits and angels, as fellow divinities with God. But this is also the fallacy of Christians, who say that God has a son, thus mixing God together with human flesh and imagining that there are thus two gods, the Father in the divine realm and the Son in the created realm. "It is not for God to take a son unto Him. Glory be to Him!" (19:35).

The oneness of God means, therefore, that all power belongs to God. There is no other source of power, since God has no competitors. It follows, then, since God is the only creator of the world, that everything that takes place in the created world results from God's will. The Quran says, "No female bears or brings forth, save with His knowledge; and none is given long life who is given long life neither is any diminished in his life, but it is in a Book" (35:11). Again, "No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before We create it" (57:22). God does, within the structure of almighty governance, allow a certain measure of freedom to creatures, thus giving them moral responsibility for their actions. But the fact that God is almighty means most importantly that no other divine power rules and directs our lives.

The Unity of All Human Knowledge Since God is one, it follows that the created world is also one. It is not enslaved to a variety of supernatural powers but is totally under the dominion of the one God. In an eloquent passage, the Quran celebrates the unity of God's power:

> What, is God better, or that they associate [gods with Him]? He who created the heavens and earth, and sent down for you out of heaven water; and We caused to grow therewith gardens full of loveliness whose trees you could never grow. Is there a god with God? Nay, but they are a people who assign to Him equals! He who made the earth a fixed place and set amidst it rivers and appointed for it firm mountains and placed a partition between the two seas. Is there a god with God? Nay, but the most of them have no knowledge.
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> (27:60–61)

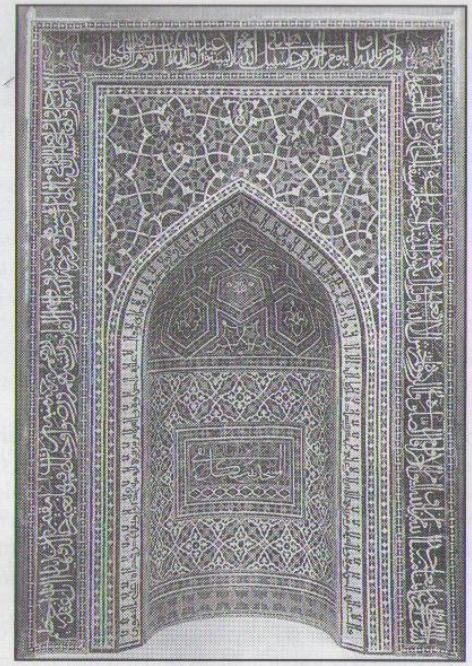
The Quran says that if there were in heaven and earth other gods besides God, surely the heaven and earth would dissolve into chaos (21:22). Thus, belief in the oneness of God is an affirmation of the unity and dignity of the created world. The creature knows that God alone is the possessor of all power and that none besides God can bless or harm, give or take away life. This belief, thus, frees humans from fearing any other power in the created world. It makes it possible to live life to the fullest as God intends, not overawed by the greatness of another, not putting oneself above another. Knowing that all power, blessing, and wealth come from God makes it possible to treat all other creatures fairly, to have a humble and modest attitude, and above all to strive in everything to obey and observe the law that God has given as the guide for all creatures. Associating God's power and authority with created beings would take away the dignity, unity, and value of God's creatures.

So God is not like anything, for anything else is part of the created realm, and God is beyond all this. To liken God to anything created raises the danger of compromising God's oneness. Therefore, the Muslim tradition strictly prohibits the use of pictures or images of God. Even words and verbal images that compare God with anything else are to be avoided. "God is Greater!"

So can we know or say anything at all about God? God has given self-revelation to humans, and it is that revelation that is the source of knowledge of God—the Quran. What the Quran says about God we are to believe and submit to, recognizing that words of human language are limited in expressing the reality of God. But since God is the only divine power, all of the knowledge we derive from this created world is also, in essence, knowledge of God the one creator. Thus, knowledge encompassed in the sciences and humanities, insofar as it is not contaminated by human error, leads to the same truth about God as that found in the Quran. There is no other divine power to be discovered with human reason, through science and humanities; all knowledge must lead to the one God. The unity of God, thus, means the unity of human knowledge.

God in the World

God Is Present and Merciful Even while stressing God's transcendence and almighty power, Muslims express a strong experience of the real presence of God in the world, that is, God's immanence. God is not present as part of the created world, but the divine reality is present everywhere



Muslim decorative art is illustrated in this mosaic-laden mihrab (prayer niche), built in the thirteenth century in Isfahan, Iran. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939.

nonetheless. "To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God," says the Quran (2:115). Or again, the Quran says that no three people meet together but God is their fourth; nor five people but God is their sixth; no matter how many, God is with them wherever they may be (58:7).

God as present to us is known by many names, which express the various divine attributes.

> He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable, the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime. Glory be to God, above that they associate! He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him; He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.
>
> (59:22–24)

One of the attributes of God most stressed in Islam is mercy. The *bismillah*, a statement that begins all but one sura of the Quran, emphasizes this with a double force: "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate." Thus, Muslims know that God's ultimate design for creation is one of love and mercy.

God and the Problem of Evil The problem of evil and suffering in the world is understood by Muslims within the context of God's almighty power and mercy. In one sense, God is the cause behind everything and, therefore, even what appears to be evil and suffering is also caused by God. Oftentimes suffering can, for example, be understood as testing or discipline from God. At the same time, the Quran teaches that within the overall structure of the divine design God gives freedom and responsibility to all creatures, rewarding them for good and punishing them for disobeying. In this sense, we bring evil and suffering on ourselves by our unbelief and disobedience.

Beyond these kinds of explanations Muslims do not go. For it is not proper to inquire too inquisitively into the divine character; rather one should worship and submit to God. "God is our Enough," Muslims say when faced with a puzzle of life, for it is the reality of God rather than our understanding that comes first and foremost. Characteristically, Muslims end all inquiries about God and God's ways with the words, "God knows." And that is sufficient.

NATURE OF THE WORLD AND HUMANS

The World as God's Creation

What is life all about anyway? The *Fatihah* or "Opening" of the Quran states, "In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate. Praise to God, the Lord of the Worlds!" (*rabb al-'alamin*). And so God is, in Islam as in Judaism and Christianity, the master and designer of all that exists. Much that is said by Jews and Christians about the creator and about the world and humans as the creation has familiar echoes in the Islamic affirmations. But the Muslim view has its own distinctive colorations, for Muslims start from the center of their faith to understand creation—from the Quran, with its rhapsodic revelations about God as the creator and master, and the world as servant and sign of God's power and design. Moving out from the revelation of the Quran, Muslims believe they can see the signs of God the creator in everything, for all exists and operates according to God's design and purpose.

God as the Master Creator God is the Master of the Worlds. This means two important things for Muslims: God is transcendent with no associates in the created realm, and creation fulfills its worth and dignity in serving God.

God is the Master (*rabb*). The Quran says, "That then is God your Lord; there is no god but He, the Creator of everything. So serve Him, for He is Guardian over everything" (6:102). God does not share creative power with anything; God has no associates in the created realm who assist in the divine powers. Unbelievers often mistake elements of the created world to be associates with God, such as forces of nature, angels, or divine-human beings. But this is *shirk*, that great sin of compromising the unity of God. Throughout the Quran the rhapsody goes on, changing color and tone but presenting the same essential message:

> In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
> All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies God;
> He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.
> To Him belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth;
> He gives life, and He makes to die, and He is powerful over everything.
> He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward;
> He has knowledge of everything.
> It is He that created the heavens and the earth in six days then seated Himself upon the Throne.
> He knows what penetrates into the earth, and what comes forth from it,
> what comes down from heaven, and what goes up unto it. . . .
> He makes the night to enter into the day and makes the day to enter into the night.
> He knows the thoughts within the breasts.
>
> (57:1–6)

The Quran speaks of God creating the world in six days, although there is no day-by-day narrative account as in Genesis 1. But as to how God created, there can be no compromising God's transcendence: Creation comes through the mighty word. God simply commands, "Be," and it is (36:82). Even the idea that God rested on the seventh day is avoided. After the six days of creation, God sat on the throne, regulating the world (10:3). For God to rest might imply weariness and, therefore, the Quran states emphatically that God was not wearied by the act of creation (50:15). For this reason, perhaps, the notion of a sabbath rest is not a part of Islamic worship; the communal day of prayer (Friday) is not considered to be a day of rest from work.

Dignity and Value of Creation Since God is Master of the Worlds, this means all creation has been given dignity and value as creature. Those who mix God's divinity with created things actually undermine and denigrate the worth of the created realm. All creation finds its worth in being servant (*'abd*) of the master creator. God created everything in the universe with a design. In the Quran God says, "We have not created the heavens and earth, and what between them is, for vanity" (38:27), nor as "playing" (21:16). Rather, everything in the orderly universe is assigned a place in a grand scheme, all knit together by the Master of the Worlds to follow that design and purpose.

And it is in following that design and purpose that all things find their true value and dignity. God created everything for one overarching purpose: to serve God. "To Him has surrendered whoso is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly" (3:83). All things by nature follow the cosmic law of creation—the law of the Master—and that means the whole of nature is in some sense "muslim." There is a natural, cosmic "islam," in which stars and rain, molecules and plants, minerals and animals all worship and serve God by conforming to the law of their being. Since all follow God's design, all things must have dignity and value, for God "has created all things well" (32:7).

Humankind: Caliph and Servant Like the Torah, the Quran singles out humans as God's special creation, some passages bringing together both the original creation of humans from dust and clay and God's continuing creation of humans in the womb:

> Surely We created you of dust,
> then of a sperm-drop,
> then of a blood clot,
> then of a lump of flesh, formed and unformed
> that We may make clear to you.
> And We establish in the wombs
> what We will, till a stated term,
> then We deliver you as infants,
> then that you may come of age.
>
> (22:5)

Whereas the Quran nowhere talks of humans made in the "image" of God (which might be misunderstood as being "like" God), it does state that God breathed the "spirit" into humans, providing the breath of life, the animating spirit. And humans were created male and female: "Mankind, fear

your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women" (4:1).

Among all the created things, humans are singled out for a special role, designated as the *khalifa* (caliph) of God. The Quran states:

> And when Thy Lord said to the angels,
> "I am setting in the earth a viceroy *(khalifa)*."
> They said, "What, will you set therein one
> who will do corruption there, and shed blood,
> while We proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?"
> He said, "Assuredly I know
> that you know not."
> And He taught Adam the names, all of them;
> then He presented them unto the angels
> and said, "Now tell Me the names of these,
> if you speak truly."
> They said, "Glory be to Thee! We know not
> save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise."
> He said, "Adam, tell them their names. . . ."
> And when We said to the angels, "Bow yourselves to Adam";
> so they bowed themselves, save Iblis; he refused. . . .
>
> (2:30–34)

The word *khalifa* means deputy or representative, indicating that humans have a preeminent status and role to exercise dominion over the rest of creation as the caliph of God. God teaches humans the names—this establishes human competence in identifying, naming, and managing creation, and it is something even the angels cannot attain. In another dramatic passage, the Quran reports that God offered the divine trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it, being afraid of it—but humankind carried it (33:72).

But even as humans are God's caliph over the rest of creation, the proper relation to God the Master is to be servant. "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all worlds. Thee only we serve," states the opening sura of the Quran. Humans share this servanthood with all creation—indeed, human life largely submits to God's law by nature: genetic patterns, heartbeat and breathing, growth in youth and decline in old age. But humans differ from all other creatures in three divine qualities: an intelligence that can discern between the true and the false, a will freely to choose, and the power of speech to worship God.[1] God possesses these qualities perfectly, and God has given them in trust to humans. It is in this arena that the real drama of humans serving the Master is played out. Those who achieve completeness by using reason, free will, and speech to follow God's design are perfect "muslims," with not only their bodies but also their reason, judgment, and speech submitted to God. Now they are at peace with the whole universe, serving the one whom the whole universe serves—and, thus, they are fit to be God's caliph within creation.

To be God's caliph and servant, humans need guidance. "Guide us in the straight path," says sura 1. And this is what is provided in the Quran and in the Law taken from it—a detailed blueprint of the Islamic order for human life. Such guidance does not contradict or demean human reason. In fact, Muslims feel that God endowed humans with the capacity to reason and acquire knowledge, and by using this correctly, humans will choose the truth of the Master. Guidance comes from the Quran—but through human reason this same truth can be uncovered in all the human arts and sciences for human welfare.

Negligence and Unbelief

Why do people do evil and destructive things? The Muslim answer is quite different from the Christian answer to that question. There is no idea of a fundamentally sinful human nature in Islam, as there is in Christianity. The Islamic view is more similar to the Jewish answer but still has its own shape. What is perhaps most distinctive in the Muslim view is the idea that it is forgetfulness and negligence of what we really are that lie behind human sin and evil-doing.

By Nature Muslim, but Forgetful As we saw, all people are "muslim" by nature, according to the law of God's creation. Just as a stone falls and a tree grows and a fire burns in accordance with the law of nature, so humans involuntarily follow God's natural law in most of their various mental and physical functions. But God created humans for a special role among all creation, expecting them to be God's viceroy on earth. Yet only God is perfect. Humans are limited and imperfect, and there are obstacles in the way of using intelligence, will, and speech in submission to God's law. Humans by nature are negligent, not paying attention to the true nature of things and to their own true nature. And they are forgetful, allowing the guidance given by prophets in the past gradually to slip out of active remembrance.

Though humans were created as God's caliph and though they made a covenant with God to accept the divine trust, they are always forgetting who they really are and neglecting the natural law of submission to God as the way of fulfilling their true nature. Humans have the tendency to fall asleep, as it were, and live in a kind of dream world, unaware of who they are and what they should be doing in this world.

Thus, looked at in the ordinary human state, people are weak and negligent, subservient to their surroundings and prisoners of their own needs and passions. It is not that their needs and passions are evil. God created humans with passions and drives as part of the design for a full, useful human life. Without passions, humans would never be motivated to strive for success and well-being in family and society. Some Muslims, like Jews, talk of two inclinations that God created in humans: the spiritual inclination that directs the intelligence and will to follow God's law, and the inclination to fulfill the desires and passions with which God has endowed humans. Both inclinations are necessary and good, when followed in harmony with God's law for human nature and fulfillment. But one who is asleep to his or her true nature unknowingly becomes a slave to the inclination of the passions. And this means becoming a slave of the creaturely surroundings of human life—a slave of other humans needed to gratify one's lusts, and a slave of the material world needed to satisfy one's cravings for wealth and pleasure.

Muslims emphasize that sin is not of the essence of human nature. There is no such thing as "original sin," which would mean that the human will is fatally warped and inevitably leads to evil deeds. Rather, sin arises from forgetting and neglecting what we really are, failing to use our intellect and will to recognize the Lord and Creator. This leads us to misuse our reason and our freedom of choice by choosing to deny God and surrendering to our needs and passions.

A Kafir: Concealing One's Muslim Nature A person who out of forgetfulness and neglect denies God is called a *kafir*, an unbeliever. In Arabic, *kufr* means to cover or conceal. Those who deny God are concealing what is real and true in the whole universe and in their own lives and nature. Unbelievers think they have true knowledge and understanding, having the illusion that they are following their reason and choosing that which is true. Yet unbelievers are really blinded by ignorance, for they see the intricate working and design of the whole universe but are blind as to the Designer of it all. They experience the marvelous working of their own bodies, but they understand nothing of the Maker of their bodies. They participate in the human race—to whom God has given the divine trust and the divine qualities of intellect, will, and speech—yet they deny the Source of it all. Like persons who have rented a house but refuse to pay the rent, they as members of humankind have accepted the trust that God gave to humans but refuse to acknowledge the Creator or live up to their part of the bargain.

What unbelievers do, really, is to rebel against the very course of nature, the law that God has ordained for all things. They set up creaturely things as worthy of the love and reverence they should show only to God. Thus, kafirs always become *mushriks*, those who associate other things with God and, thus, commit the great sin of denying the unity of God (*shirk*). Unbelievers bow their heads to other powers, whether these are sun and moon, angels, human heroes or powerful tyrants, or their own wants and passions. Thus, they commit the greatest injustice and treason possible: They use God's bountiful gifts, while at the same time denying and disobeying their real Lord and Master.

The Struggle Within Since sin is not of the essence of humans, it is possible to live in total submission to God's law—that is, it is possible for humans to be perfect Muslims, since God does not require anything of us that is beyond our capabilities. Muslims believe that the prophets through whom God has sent revelation have all been perfect humans, completely fulfilling God's will. However, Muslims recognize that prophets are rare individuals and that most humans have the tendency of forgetfulness and neglect. Even for believers who sincerely desire to live according to God's law, there are internal drives and desires that seek to get the upper hand. Muslims do take sin seriously; to master one's forgetfulness and the dominating drives of one's nature is the great war or struggle in human life.

In the Muslim view, any act of doing what God has prohibited or failing to do what is commanded is a sin. As in Judaism and Christianity, so also in Islam, unbelief and sin have consequences. Of course, the unbeliever cannot do harm to God, the Master of the Worlds. But by *kufr*, humans bring about their own disgrace and failure, both in this life and in the world to come.

By going against the natural law given by God, unbelievers destroy all harmony and peace in their own lives, and in every part of the world they bring infection and abuse with their unbelief. So unbelievers will not find peace and well-being in life. Having destroyed the natural order, they will meet failure in everything they do. Their selfishness and treason against God will infect their family life, business, and relations to others. They will cause war and bloodshed in human society. And they will abuse and disrupt the harmony of nature. In one way or another, all the evils and troubles of the world have their origin in human unbelief.

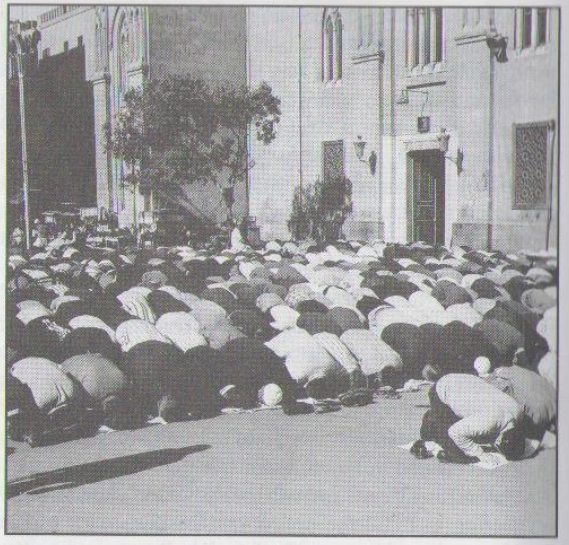
On the day of judgment, God will make an accounting of what each person has done. Each person's deeds will be weighed in a balance, and in the case of an unbeliever, the evil deeds will far outweigh the good deeds. Everything the unbeliever has done will testify against him or her. Then God will consign the traitor to the horrors of the eternal Fire. In this way the laws that had been so disrupted and twisted by the unbeliever will finally be set back in order. "All this; but for the insolent awaits an ill resort, Gehenna, wherein they are roasted—an evil cradling! All this; so let them taste it—boiling water and pus, and other torments of the like kind coupled together" (Quran 38:55–58).

In the Muslim view, there is no excuse for being an unbeliever. God's design in the world, and the gifts of intelligence and will, should lead all people to acknowledge and submit to the Creator. To awaken humans out of forgetfulness, God has always and to all peoples been sending prophets with reminders. So all who sin in unbelief are justly punished by God.

The warning of the coming punishment for unbelief should lead us to repent, to ask God for mercy. In God's gracious design it is possible for us to repent, be forgiven, and turn our efforts anew to living our lives as God would have us live them.

GUIDANCE ON THE STRAIGHT PATH

How can we start living *real* life? How can we be transformed? It should be noted from the outset that the Muslim tradition has no word that is properly translated as "be saved" or "salvation." Muslims consider the idea of "salvation" to be appropriate to religions such as Christianity, where the stress is on God's action while humans have a passive role. In the Muslim's view, as we have seen, humans have a divinely designed nature that has the capacity of realizing God's design. Rather than asking, "How can I be saved?," Muslims would rather ask, "How can I achieve the life of felicity?" The Muslim word for "felicity" (*falah*) or for the verb "to become felicitous" denotes a thoroughly active concept of the human path toward the ideal life. There is action from God, the Merciful and Compassionate, of course. God guides, forgives, and inspires. But fundamentally the path is an active one of human self-transformation in harmony with God's design of felicity.



Muslims in Cairo observing the ritual of prayer.

As we have seen, Muslims see humans as not essentially sinful or wicked; rather, God created them good and endowed them with divine attributes by which humans can realize the divine trust. But humans are imperfect, and this shows itself especially in forgetfulness and negligence, from which derive all acts of sin and unbelief with their disastrous consequences. The path of transformation then is a "reminding" to counter human forgetfulness and an "inspiring" to counter negligence. And the practice of the path will be directed toward the divine qualities of intelligence, free will, and speech. The path fills one with knowledge, brings about willing submission, and provides the practice of prayer and worship.

Islam as a Path of Knowledge

The path of Islam is fundamentally a path of knowledge. Although the central concept is that of *islam* or submission, this is not where the path begins. As we have seen, there is a cosmic islam in which the whole creation submits to God's design in following the natural law, and to a large extent also in human life we share in this natural submission. But in the distinctly human realm, that constituted by the divine qualities of intelligence, free will, and speech, submission to God does not take place naturally according to the law of creation. For this is the realm in which humans are called upon to take up the divine qualities and fulfill the divine trust by submitting to God out of free will.

Faith and Submission But what is it that leads to islam, submission to God, in the distinctively human realm? The Muslim answer is **iman**. This is the Muslim word for "faith," but its meaning is somewhat different from the Christian notion of faith. Muslims point out that Christians often see "faith" as a believing without knowing why, an accepting without rational certainty, a "leap of faith" even against the testimony of reason. But iman in the Muslim path is faith on the basis of rational certainty arrived at through the use of our intelligence. This is the highest form of knowledge. It goes beyond the pseudo-knowledge of rational thinking without God's guidance, on the one hand, and the superstition of believing without reason, on the other. It is this iman, which we can translate as "certain knowledge," which then leads one freely to islam or submission.

How do we arrive at this iman or certain knowledge? It is true that God's whole creation is like a book full of signs that speak to our intelligence and should bring about certain knowledge on our part. But because humans are forgetful and negligent, these signs alone are usually not sufficient to arouse us out of our dreaming. Therefore, starting with Adam, God has sent reminders through the prophets for guidance on the path toward certain knowledge and submission. This is the role of all the revelations that God has sent to all peoples of all times and places. These revelations have included the Torah brought through Moses and the Gospel brought through Jesus, culminating in the Quran as the final, perfect reminder. The Quran, in Muslim teaching, is the eternal, uncreated Book, authored by God and sent down through the prophet Muhammad. It is the perfect, incomparable Book containing the complete truth for all peoples of all times and places. God's revelation arouses our intellect from its dreaming state and challenges us to use our reason to ascertain the truth about existence.

> Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,
> created Man of a blood-clot.
> Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,
> who taught by the Pen,
> taught Man that he knew not.
>
> (96:1–5)

Although this guidance in the Quran comes from God, no one is compelled to accept and follow it. "No compulsion is there in religion," the Quran states (2:256). Rather, humans are to hear the revelation, study, examine, test, and inquire of it, until finally their reason leads them to iman, certain knowledge of the truth. This is possible because the same God both created human reason and sent down the Quran as guidance. If we truly and freely follow our intellect, Muslims believe, we will arrive at the certain knowledge that the truth presented in the Quran is the ultimate truth and highest knowledge. And—following our intellect further—we will find that everywhere in this universe the same truth is to be found, for everything is of one piece in God's design. In this way, through using our intelligence in studying God's revelation and the world, we arrive at iman, certain knowledge, saying with the Quran: "The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished away" (17:81). In this sense, Muslims say, Islam is the natural religion.

Because of the emphasis on each person following only the dictates of his or her own intelligence, Islam does not have any priesthood or religious magistracy that tells Muslims what must be believed. Every Muslim, of course, is duty bound to teach others what he or she knows; and Islam does have its venerated teachers. But no Muslim is required to accept anything as true just because other Muslims have found it to be true. Muslims must accept only what they themselves find rational, coherent, and corresponding to reality. Nothing is to be accepted by faith without being rationally convinced.

It has been the common experience of Muslims, however, that everything presented in the Quran is certain knowledge, for it corresponds with reality as we know it through our intellect. Furthermore, since the Quran is the perfect guide to the truth, the total depth of its meaning can never

be plumbed. Each time one studies a passage of the Quran, some new aspect of the truth can be understood. Even a whole lifetime of study of the Quran can never exhaust the meaning of its truth.

Thus, iman, certain knowledge, is the first step on the path, the intelligence actively searching and reaching the certainty of truth. Then it is possible, in the arena of free will, for islam, submission, to take place. A choice has to be made on the basis of knowledge. Do we choose the true or the false? If we have not arrived at certain knowledge, if we have instead followed the pseudo-knowledge of reason blind to God's guidance or the superstition of irrational faith, then we cannot choose the good because our mind is trapped in falsehood. But if we have arrived at certain knowledge through our intelligence, then our will can choose the true and we can submit to God.

It is important that this islam take place by virtue of free choice, for that is the only way God's design can be fulfilled. It is said that the reason heaven and earth did not accept the divine trust when it was offered to them is because they have no free will. Humans accepted this trust because they are free moral agents and can realize the design of God's creation. Knowledge achieved by intelligence on the basis of God's guidance, then submission chosen by free will—this is the path of Islam.

Transformation and the Shari'ah The attainment of certain knowledge and submission bring about a transformation in humans. This changes the heart and effects a total transformation in human life. If one is a kafir, an unbeliever, one is out of harmony with the law of nature and brings disruption and bloodshed into the world. But if one achieves certain knowledge and, therefore, submits, then one is in harmony with God's will and design, being at peace with the creator and whole creation. Mawdudi describes this state of transformation:

> He has now consciously submitted to Him Whom he had already been unconsciously obeying. He has now willingly offered obedience to the Master Whom he already owed obedience to involuntarily. . . . Now his reason and judgement are set on an even keel—for he has rightly decided to obey the Being Who bestowed upon him the faculty of thinking and judging. His tongue is also truthful for it expresses its belief in the Lord Who gave it the faculty of speech. Now the whole of his existence is an embodiment of truth for, in all spheres of life, he voluntarily as well as involuntarily obeys the laws of One God—the Lord of the Universe. Now he is at peace with the whole universe for he worships Him Whom the whole universe worships.[2]

The practice of the path of Islam involves studying and learning, teaching, reciting, praying, thinking, and choosing. It is a lifelong path, which continues from birth to death. This path of transformation is based on the Shari'ah, the law or code of behavior in Islam. This law, which is taken from the Quran and the Hadith, provides guidance for the regulation of all aspects of life in the best interests of humans and in accord with God's design. We look at some of the specifics of the Shari'ah later. But here we need to understand that performing the Shari'ah is the following of the path of Islam. It is the means by which the individual person molds and shapes his or her own life into the larger design intended by God. In some respects the Shari'ah plays the same transformative role for Muslims as the Halakhah plays for Jews. This discipline of following the law is a process of education in the highest sense, for the cultivation and perfection of godlike qualities.

The Greater Jihad The path of transformation is a continuous struggle. Although humans are not evil by nature, they are also not perfect by nature. So the path of submission is one that requires constant striving, repenting, studying, praying, and disciplining. One term for this spiritual struggle in Islam is *jihad*. The prophet Muhammad, returning from one of the early wars, said, "We have returned from the small jihad to the great jihad." This idea of jihad refers to the need for striving and struggling to establish God's design in the world. Sometimes it takes the form of outer struggle or holy war in defense of the law of God. But it also refers to the inner struggle of all Muslims, the lifelong striving to shape one's own life into conformity with God's design—this is called the greater jihad. This is the path: a continual holy war against all God's enemies—unbelievers and evildoers, of course, but also all our own failings, sins, and unbeliefs.

Blessings Now and in the Life Hereafter

Following the straight path brings blessings and rewards. It brings felicity in this world and in the next. As in Judaism and Christianity, so also in Islam, one of the important blessings is simply the following of the path itself. For it is the way of life most in harmony with God and all creation and, therefore, it brings peace and happiness to all who practice it.

Those who know God's design will always be successful, respected, wealthy, and happy. For they will always choose the right way in all fields of knowledge and action. Since Islam is the natural religion, those who follow it will be blessed by the Creator and will be sources of blessing in the world.

All Muslims consider belief in life after death to be one of the essential truths of existence. This belief includes the ideas of judgment and reward or punishment based on one's deeds. If people follow the straight path, the Quran says, they will be rewarded with the joys and delights of paradise.

> So God has guarded them from the evil of that day, and has procured them radiancy and gladness,
> and recompensed them for their patience with a Garden, and silk;
> therein they shall recline upon couches,
> therein they shall see neither sun nor bitter cold;
> near them shall be its shades, and its clusters hung meekly down,
> and there shall be passed around them vessels of silver, and goblets of crystal. . . .
> Immortal youths shall go about them;
> when thou seest them, thou supposest them scattered pearls,
> when thou seest them then thou seest bliss and a great kingdom.
> Upon them shall be green garments of silk and brocade;
> they are adorned with bracelets of silver,
> and their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught.
> "Behold, this is a recompense for you, and your striving is thanked."
>
> (76:11–22)

Descriptions of the Garden of Paradise, scattered throughout the Quran, vividly combine the delights of body and of soul, the sensual and the spiritual. In keeping with the overall teachings of the Quran about God's creation, even in paradise there is no compartmentalizing of life. God's design for creation is good, and believers rewarded with paradise enjoy both the beatific vision and the pleasures of creation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the implications, for thought, ethics, and art, of saying "There is no God but God."
2. While stressing God's transcendence, how do Muslims also emphasize God's immanence? What are some of God's attributes?
3. How does the unity of God mean that the creation has dignity and value?
4. In what sense is the whole world of nature "muslim"?
5. What is the nature and special role of humankind, according to Islam?
6. Why do many people become unbelievers? Are they evil by nature?
7. What are some major sins, in the Muslim view? What results from these sins?
8. Explain how the Muslim path is a "path of knowledge." What is *iman*? How does this lead to *islam*?
9. What is the "greater jihad" in Muslim life?
10. Explain Muslim ideas about punishment and blessing in the afterlife.

Chapter 14

Ritual Practices and the Good Life for Muslims

RITUAL WORSHIP AND SACRED TIMES

How can we find new power for life? Muslims believe that how God wants humans to live is totally structured in the Shari'ah, the Law, taken from the Quran and Hadith. God is the Master (*rabb*) and our role is to be the servant (*'abd*). Therefore, all of life is to be service (*'ibadah*), that is, worship of God. This includes both the ritual and the ethical duties of life, since nothing is excluded from God's perfect design. Let us first look at the ritual duties and then at the ethical part of worship.

The basic idea of worshiping God for Muslims is similar to Jewish and Christian views. As creatures, our primary goal is to submit to God and serve God faithfully. God deserves our praise, and remembering God constantly as we go about our life is our highest good. Like Jews, Muslims believe God has given direct guidance in *how* people should worship, providing specific rituals that are designed to meet their deepest needs as human beings and to bring harmony and well-being into their lives because, performing these rituals, they will be in harmony with God's design. There is no separation of religion from the rest of life; all aspects of common everyday life are lifted up in the continued observances of the worship of God.

Muslim holy days and festivals differ somewhat from those in Judaism and Christianity in that they are not geared to the cycles of nature in the seasons of the year. There are, of course, religious observances in the different months of the Muslim calendar. But this calendar follows the lunar pattern (twelve months of twenty-nine or thirty days each), meaning that each year is some eleven days shorter than the solar calendar. Thus, over a period of about thirty-two years, a particular Muslim festival will move through all the seasonal changes of the year—a sign of God's mercy, Muslims say. Another difference is that not as much stress is placed on one holy day of the week as the special day of rest and celebration. Whereas Friday is significant as the day for congregational noon prayers, that day does not carry the same importance as Sabbath for Jews or the Sunday worship for most Christians.

The Five Pillars

Among the central actions required in the Shari'ah for all Muslims are the so-called **Five Pillars** (*'ibadat*, "worships"). The Five Pillars are Confession, Prayer, Alms-giving, Fasting, and Pilgrimage to Mecca. As the minimum duties of Muslims in ritual worship of God, these Pillars are obligatory on all adult Muslims insofar as they are not excused because of sickness or other such reasons. Muslims believe these Five Pillars are perfectly fit to achieve complete human welfare in God's design. They are performed by each person individually, thus establishing a strong sense of individual personhood. At the same time they create the unity of the whole community, because they are done communally, even throughout the whole world. They combine physical activity with ritual purity and spiritual reflection, thus transforming the whole person. Simple to perform, they at the same time possess great spiritual profundity. All these rituals center squarely on the unity of God and are practical rituals of submission to God. They are also designed to achieve social improvement and serve effectively in the Islamicization of society.

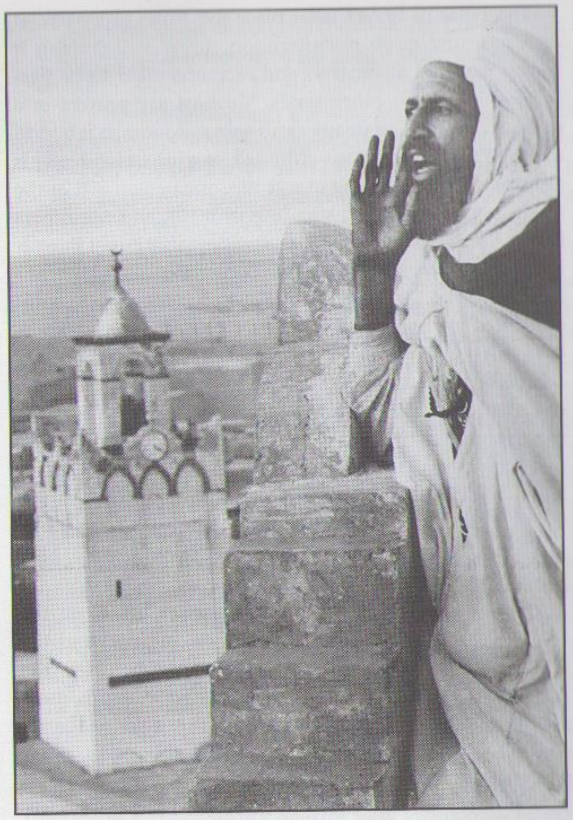
Saying the Shahadah (Confession) To Muslims, the brief Shahadah is certainly one of the most important human vocal sounds, chanted out in sonorous Arabic syllables: *ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah, ashhadu anna muhammad ar-rasula Allah*; that is, "I testify that there is no God but God; I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." This Confession is a testimony, a public witnessing to the unity of God and to the Quran brought through Muhammad as God's final revelation. Saying it, with conviction and intention, makes one a Muslim. The whole universe submits to God's will through the laws of nature. But humans have the great responsibility of testifying to the unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad by utilizing the special human gifts of intelligence, free will, and speech—and this testimony comes first and foremost in saying the Shahadah.

The Shahadah is constantly on the lips of Muslims; as noted earlier it is the first thing spoken in an infant's ear and the last thing spoken and heard by a dying Muslim. It is incorporated into every call to prayer and into the prayers themselves, thus sounding forth many times every day in every Muslim community. The Shahadah frequently appears as a visual art form, used as calligraphic decoration on walls and ceilings of mosques, posters, banners, curtains, and the like.

The unity of God also means the unity of humankind. One Muslim thinker, Muhammad Lahbabi, calls the Shahadah "a perpetual crossroads between transcendence and immanence, between the Absolute and finitude."[1] Muslims speak this as a constant testimony and act of submission to God, demonstrating thereby also their solidarity with all other Muslims. Since Muslims live in all lands of the world and in all time zones, the Shahadah is literally a perpetual sound that never ceases.

The Ritual of Prayer (Salat) According to most Muslims, the Pillar of Prayer is the heart and soul of Muslim life. Since the greatest evil would be forgetting God, it is gracious divine guidance that requires humans to remember God by submitting in Prayer (**Salat**) five times a day, seven days a week. It is difficult to forget God when one's daily activities are so interpenetrated with the ritual of prayer.

Prayer is basically a public expression of praise and submission to God. It is not spontaneous conversing with God—Muslims do use that kind of prayer also, which they call *du'a*.



The muezzin sounds out the call to prayer from atop the minaret.

But the required Prayer ritual follows set patterns and uses standard formulas—in Arabic—from the Quran and other prayers. According to Muslims, the ritual of Prayer is perfectly designed to sanctify all of life. It combines mental concentration with vocal expression. It is deeply spiritual but also puts the whole body physically into the service of God. An individual action, it provides a compelling sense of community with fellow Muslims. The vision of the Prayer is profound: Muslims in every land, representing the whole human race, facing the same center of the world, saying the same Arabic prayers throughout every day, in submission to the one God. That the unity of God means the unity of the human race is powerfully experienced in Prayer.

The Pillar of Prayer takes place five times every day, at early morning, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and evening. It is also required at funerals and recommended to be performed at certain other times. Muslims say prayers in a mosque, at home, or in any clean spot outdoors. It is best to say the Prayer in a group, although praying individually is also valid. When praying in a group, one person acts as the imam or prayer leader, standing in front, and the others follow the pattern of the imam, standing in straight lines. It is important to perform the Prayer correctly and in harmony. The signal for Prayer comes when the muezzin sings out the call to prayer from atop the minaret tower (nowadays often a loudspeaker system is used). In a haunting, compelling chant, the muezzin calls out in Arabic, repeating each phrase the required number of times: "God is most great! I testify that there is no God but God. I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Hurry to Prayer. Hurry to success. God is most great! There is no God but God." Muslims prepare to perform the Prayer first of all by purifying themselves, washing the hands, arms, face, nostrils, hair, ears, and feet with water.

Mental, vocal, and physical actions are united in the Prayer. Standing and facing Mecca, having declared the intention to pray, the worshiper raises the hands to the sides of the head and says, "*Allahu akbar*" (God is most great!). With hands resting on the abdomen, he or she recites the first sura of the Quran together with other prayers and verses. Then the worshiper bows with hands on the knees saying "Glory to my great Lord" and, after praising God again in a standing position, swiftly descends to the prostrate position with knees, forehead, and palms on the floor or ground. In this physical attitude of total submission, he or she says, "Glory to my Lord, the Most High!" Then the worshiper sits and finally does the prostration again before resuming the standing position. This completes one cycle of prayers; the cycle is repeated again a number of times, depending on which Prayer it is. There are two cycles of prayers in morning Prayer, four at noon, afternoon, and night Prayer, and three at sunset Prayer. Near the close of the Prayer, the worshiper testifies the Confession, blesses the Prophet Muhammad and his family, and turning the head to both sides says, "Peace be upon you all and the mercy of God"—directed to all fellow Muslims and to all humankind in need of God's guidance.

At the Friday noon Prayer, Muslims are to assemble at the mosque as a congregation (women are not required to attend the mosque). The imam leads the prayer standing in front of the mihrab, the niche in the wall showing the direction to Mecca, and the worshippers stand in long straight lines behind. An important feature of this congregational service is the sermon (*khutba*), given by the imam or another recognized scholar from a pulpit (**minbar**), providing guidance for the people.

The Pillar of Alms-giving (Zakat) Wealth is not viewed as evil by Muslims—God blesses the faithful with prosperity. But all wealth belongs to God, who has directed us to share it with those who are less fortunate, as a sign that all are equal before God and deserve a just and fair livelihood. As a legal religious duty, Alms-giving (**zakat**) is not the same as charity; Muslims should also be generous and provide for the needy in other ways. Alms-giving is more like an annual religious tax computed on various forms of wealth, such as money, cattle, and crops.

Alms-giving is required of Muslims who have reached their majority (usually sixteen) and who possess a minimum of each type of wealth. The general rate is 2.5 percent annually. It is to be given, according to the Quran, to those who are poor, the needy, those who collect alms, new converts, slaves for their ransom, debtors, those doing good works in God's way, and travelers (Quran 9:60). It should not be given to Jews and Christians who live in the Muslim community—they should be given other types of help where needed. It is also not to be used for things like building mosques or burying the dead, nor given to parents, children, or spouse—there are other ways to take care of such needs. Traditionally, Muslim governments collected and distributed this tax, but now in some lands it is a matter of individual responsibility. Alms-giving—or wealth-sharing, as some modern Muslims prefer to call it—is definitely not to be regarded as doing a favor, either by the giver or the receiver. The wealth is God's, and it should not be given in a way that embarrasses the recipient or makes the giver proud. Zakat is a way of testifying to the unity of God and of humanity.

The Pillar of Fasting (Sawm) One important holy season that comes every year is the month of Fasting, the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is an especially sacred time for Muslims

because during this month, the first revelation descended on the Prophet. By fasting during the daylight hours, Muslims set apart this whole month as sacred time. It is a time of intense spiritual discipline, for Muslims abstain not only from food and drink but also from evil thoughts toward others. But it is also a joyous time, with opportunities to gather with family and friends at night. Fasting (**Sawm**) is not a means of punishing the body, as in some religions. The bodily needs and passions are not evil; they are good gifts of God and necessary for life. But people sometimes let themselves be controlled by their drives and passions, and Fasting is a time to break bad habits and regain control. By slowing down and withholding things, one learns a richer appreciation of material pleasures. There are physical benefits to Fasting as well, and it helps one feel a deeper sympathy for the deprived and hungry of the world. It strengthens the solidarity of the community, and, most importantly, it provides discipline for greater submission to God.

The practice of Fasting is simple: From first light in the morning until sundown at night, nothing is taken into the body. Forbidden are eating, drinking, smoking, sexual relations, even taking medicine. Breaking the fast intentionally carries penalties, such as extra days of fasting or giving meals to needy people. However, Fasting should not be permitted to impair one's health, and the sick, the elderly, pregnant women, and small children are excused from the requirement; those who are able should make it up later.

During the nighttime hours, eating and drinking are permitted, and Ramadan nights are joyful, communal times. But overall there is a heightened spiritual atmosphere during Ramadan, with many giving special attention to studying the Quran and praying. Restaurants and ordinary entertainments are closed during the day, and the Muslim community revitalizes its spiritual foundations.

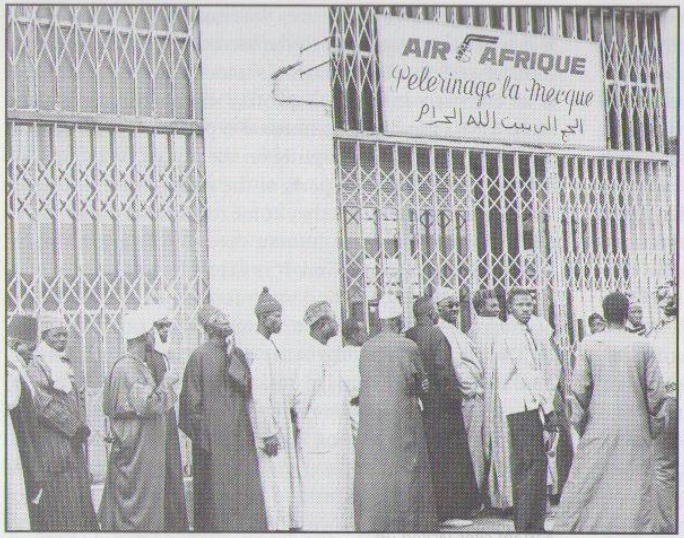
The Pilgrimage (Hajj) The high point of life for many Muslims is the Pilgrimage (**Hajj**) to Mecca, required once in the lifetime of a Muslim. Muslims may undertake the Pilgrimage only if they are physically and financially capable. One cannot borrow money for this, since all debts must be paid before the Pilgrimage. Nor should one deprive the family in order to go on the Pilgrimage; money should be saved up for many years for this great duty. Women also are equal participants in the Pilgrimage, accompanied by their husbands or relatives.

The Pilgrimage epitomizes the ritual duty of Muslims. It is a dramatic connection to the sacred story, walking in the footsteps of Abraham, Hagar, Ishmael, and Muhammad. It is an intensely individual spiritual experience, and at the same time a movingly communal experience. Testimony to the unity of God is constantly on the lips of everyone. The pilgrims come from all parts of the world, representing all nations and peoples, yet they come together at the center of the world as one—one human race standing together in submission to the one God. It is a transforming experience of death and new life, and the transformed one returning home from the Hajj is appropriately given a new title, Hajji.

The rituals of the Pilgrimage, as determined by Muhammad in his final Pilgrimage, make use of some of the pre-Islamic practices, but these rituals are transformed in their meaning. For the pilgrim, leaving home is a kind of death. The Muslim enters into a special spiritual state (**ihram**), symbolized by special garments and vows. All men wear a two-piece white garment, showing that all are equal; women may wear a white garment or their ordinary clothes. All take vows to avoid certain behavior: having sex, cutting one's hair, uprooting living things, wearing jewelry, arguing, and so forth.

After extensive identity checks by the Saudi government (only Muslims are allowed into the sacred area of Mecca), the pilgrims finally see the Ka'bah. For their whole life they have been saying the Prayer in this direction, and now finally it is right before their eyes. The Quran says that Abraham and his firstborn son Ishmael, commanded by God, built the Ka'bah, so the pilgrim feels a closeness to these great prophets of God. A sacred atmosphere is created, with the pilgrims constantly chanting the Pilgrimage formula, "I am here, O God, I am here! I am here! You are without associate! I am here! Praise and riches belong to you, and sovereignty!"

The full Pilgrimage takes place during the month of Pilgrimage and includes many rituals over a period of several days. The first main ritual is the Circling (*tawaf*), walking and trotting around the Ka'bah seven times in a counterclockwise direction—thus putting the House of God, the center of the world, at the center of one's own life. Circling the Ka'bah, the pilgrims reach out to touch the Black Stone embedded in one corner. This Black Stone, tradition says, was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel as a sign of God's pleasure, and Abraham and his son Ishmael built it into the Ka'bah. The next ritual is the Running (*sa'y*)



Muslims come from all parts of the world to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Here pilgrims wait at the airport in Senegal-Dakar for transportation to Mecca.

between two hills seven times. This is in memory of Hagar and Ishmael. Because Abraham's wife Sarah was barren, she gave her servant Hagar as a wife for Abraham and he fathered Ishmael by her. After Hagar and Ishmael were expelled from Abraham's house because of Sarah's jealousy, they were dying of thirst in the desert at Mecca. But God miraculously provided the well of Zamzam to save them. So the pilgrim acts out Hagar's frantic running in search of water and gratefully drinks from the well of Zamzam.

On the eighth day of the Pilgrimage month, the whole company of pilgrims moves out to the desert, to live in tents for the next several days. The climax of the Pilgrimage comes on the ninth day with the ritual of Standing (*wuquf*) at the Plain of Arafat and the Mount of Mercy. From noon until sunset all the pilgrims stand together as the representatives of the whole human race, praising and submitting to the one God of all.

In the next days come the rituals of Stoning and the Feast of Sacrifice (*'id al-adha*). The Quran and Hadith tell that Abraham, commanded by God, brought his son Ishmael here to sacrifice him. Satan tempted Ishmael to run away, but Ishmael threw stones at Satan to drive off this temptation. God, seeing Abraham and Ishmael's faithfulness, intervened through an angel and provided a ram for the sacrifice. To make this experience of their ancestors real again, each pilgrim performs the ritual of Stoning, throwing forty-nine pebbles at three stone "Satans" in a series of episodes over the next days. The Feast of Sacrifice requires the head of each household to ritually slaughter an animal and prepare a feast, giving some of the food to the needy. This Feast of Sacrifice is observed by Muslims throughout the world, providing a link between those on the Pilgrimage and the world Muslim community.

During these rituals in the desert, the pilgrims make a return to Mecca for a second Circling of the Ka'bah, and the required rituals are completed. Pilgrims usually make one more "farewell" Circling of the Ka'bah, and many also go on to visit the holy places of Medina, where the Prophet first founded the ummah of Islam and where he and many early leaders are buried.

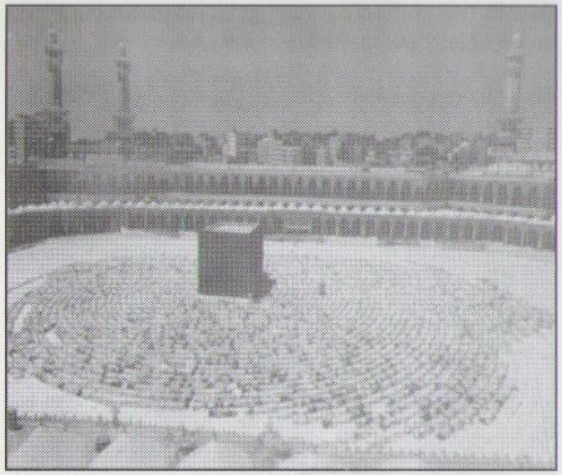
Other Festivals and Rituals

Holy Days and Commemorations The Muslim calendar year does not have a lot of required festivals. There are two "feasts" (**'id**). One is the Feast of Sacrifice already noted. The other is the Feast of Fast-breaking (*'id al-fitr*), which comes on the first day of the month following the Ramadan Fasting, a celebration of thankfulness for having been able to complete the Fasting. After morning Prayer at the mosque and a visit to the cemetery, the feast celebrates the completion of the Fasting and the return to normal life with banquets and other events. In many places this joyous festival lasts for three days.

A widely celebrated holiday is the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*mawlid al-nabi*), on the twelfth day of the third month, Rabi' al-Awwal. In such places as Egypt, this is a major holiday with a festive mood. Reciters chant verses from the Quran and a narrative of the Prophet's life. Merchants sell candies in the shapes of knights on horses for boys and doll brides for girls to celebrate this holiday. Some Muslims, especially under the Wahhabi influence in Saudi Arabia, consider this holiday an innovation and do not celebrate it. For other Muslims,

not only the Prophet but also other saints are remembered with celebrations on their birth anniversaries. Shi'ites especially celebrate the birthdays of Imam 'Ali and the members of his family.

The month of Muharram is the beginning of the Muslim calendar, associated with the Hijra of the Muslims from Mecca to Medina and, therefore, a significant sacred time. In early times the tenth of Muharram was a day of fasting called *'ashura* (ten), and it is still observed with voluntary fasting by some Sunnite Muslims. Shi'ites have attached another significant celebration to 'Ashura, for it is the traditional anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, son of 'Ali. They spend the first nine days of Muharram remembering the tragic events at Karbalah in an atmosphere of mourning. On the climactic tenth day, the drama called Ta'ziyeh is presented. Actors represent Husayn and his family on one side and the Umayyad forces on the other in the passion play. The theme is the redemptive value of the sufferings and martyrdoms of Husayn and others of the house of Muhammad.



The Ka'bah in the Grand Mosque at Mecca is one of the most important sites visited during the pilgrimage. It is also the point toward which Muslims throughout the world face during their daily prayers.

Rituals of the Passages of Life Although the Quran does not prescribe rituals for birth, Islamic tradition holds that soon after birth the call to prayer should be spoken in the baby's right ear and the summons to perform the prayer in the left ear. On the seventh day after birth the baby is usually named and a sacrifice may be performed. On the fortieth day the mother is purified and is able to resume the ritual duties.

Circumcision (*khitan*) is an important ritual of passage for boys. In some places, like Indonesia, it is performed at eleven or twelve years of age, thus functioning as a passage into adult spiritual status. In other places it commonly takes place soon after birth or a few years later. Although it is not mentioned in the Quran, Muslims everywhere regard it as an essential purification ritual. The circumcision is the occasion for much festivity, with many guests, special food, and music, and the boy is paraded around in honor and triumph as a little prince. In some localities a similar operation is performed for girls, cutting away or scarring the clitoris. Muslims disagree whether such female "circumcision" (clitoridectomy) should be performed, but those who practice it consider it a ritual of purification.

The whole Muslim tradition encourages a Muslim to marry as soon in life as possible and to have many children. Since marriage is one of God's good gifts, celibacy and marital abstinence are forbidden, except for exceptional reasons during certain periods of a person's life. Marriage is not a sacrament, as in Christianity, nor is it an unconditional binding together no matter what. The marriage is usually arranged by parents, since it brings two families together into a new relationship. No one may be married without his or her own consent, but in practice the girl is usually represented by a guardian, who interprets her silence as consent. A legal contract is written that spells out the rights and duties of both. Should one party fail to live up to the contract, the marriage can be annulled. One thing included in the contract is the bridal gift (*mahr*), which the groom must provide for his bride and which remains hers.

The marriage is legally completed by the ritual of signing the marriage contract, by the groom and the guardian of the bride. But after this ritual is completed, the great communal celebration commences, with many guests, special foods, music making, and dancing. The festivities reflect the traditional culture of the people and, thus, differ widely in the different parts of the Muslim world. In more traditional societies the men and the women celebrate separately.

The Islamic rituals surrounding death show a realistic acceptance of death as the end of life and a belief in the passage through the grave to resurrection, judgment, and

reward. One should be ready at all times for one's own death. Al-Ghazali gave this spiritual advice:

> When you want to go to sleep, lay out your bed pointing to Mecca, and sleep on your right side, the side on which the corpse reclines in the tomb. . . . Remember that in like manner you will lie in the tomb, completely alone; only your works will be with you, only the effort you have made will be rewarded.[2]

Feelings about the grave are also colored by the belief that interrogation by the angels begins as soon as one is buried, and the body may undergo purgatorial punishments in the grave before the general resurrection. True believers, of course, can expect reward and happiness on Judgment Day.

At the onset of death, the dying person's face should be turned toward Mecca and the words, "There is no God but God," should be recited, and also sura *Ya Sin* (36), which deals with death and resurrection. The body should be given the full purificatory washing and perfumed, then wrapped in a simple cotton shroud resembling the Pilgrimage *ihram* garment. The Muslim is now commencing his or her final pilgrimage. It is required that Muslims perform the Pillar of Prayer in the presence of the deceased person, with the entire service performed standing. Special prayers are said on behalf of the deceased. After the procession to the cemetery, the body is placed in a grave with a niche carved out on one side; the body lies on its side directly on the ground, with the face in the direction of Mecca. As the mourners drop earth to cover the grave, they may recite the words of the Quran, "Out of the earth We created you, and We shall restore you into it, and bring you forth from it a second time" (20:55). The bereaved mourn for three days after the burial and thereafter remember the deceased periodically with prayer and reading of the Quran.

Muslim Views of Healing and Medicine

Since the beginnings of Islam, healing and wholeness have been a central topic in Muslim discourse. One reason for this interest is the central emphasis in the Quran on showing justice and mercy to all creatures. Saving and preserving life are highly regarded: "Whoso gives life to a soul, shall be as if he has given life to mankind altogether" (5:32). Hadiths from the prophet Muhammad state that for every disease God has sent a remedy as well and that medications are part of God's decree. Therefore, it is an obligation to get treatment when sick, for, as the Quran says, "[God] gives me to eat and drink, and, when I am sick, heals me" (26:80). Many treatises dealing with healing were written in early Islam, and one often-stated principle is that, after the performance of religious duties, there is no greater service to God than to heal people.

In the Muslim monotheistic vision, all wellness and illness are embraced within God's merciful rule in the world. There may be various immediate reasons for sickness—Satan, the jinn, punishment, testing, and others—but all of this is in God's power. And all healing, however it comes, ultimately is from God. Since God has created all the natural means of healing and has given humans intellect and will, Muslims promoted the study and development of medical practices as part of service to God and to humans. In the medieval period, for example, Muslims established many hospitals and clinics in Baghdad, Egypt, India, and elsewhere, where doctors (some of whom were Christian) treated Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and even animals. They cared for mental patients and had doctors to treat inmates of prisons. Interestingly, these hospitals had regular bands of musicians and developed musical therapy as a way of contributing to the healing of their patients. In traditional Muslim societies, such as those in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and India, traditions of healing have also included reliance on traditional healers, holy men and women, marabouts, and tombs of saints—these Muslims believe that God's healing power also comes through these means.

Today Muslims continue to promote the healing arts as an important way of serving God. The First International Conference on Islamic Medicine, held in Kuwait in 1981, produced a remarkable document called *Islamic Code of Medical Ethics*, spelling out the integral connection between Islamic beliefs and medical practice. The practice of medicine is seen in direct collaboration with God's design for the world:

> Like all aspects of knowledge, medical knowledge is part of the knowledge of God "who taught man what man never knew." . . . The study of Medicine entails the revealing of God's signs in His creation. "And in yourselves . . . do you not see?" The practice of Medicine brings God's mercy unto His subjects. Medical practice is therefore an act of worship and charity on top of being a career to make a living.[3]

Since the physician is worshiping God by practicing medicine, it is important that he or she be well versed in the Islamic faith. Physicians should keep up with all the latest findings in medical science, but they need to make sure

they use only those procedures that are in keeping with Islamic principles. As for the community, the provision of medical treatment, even for those who cannot pay for it, is described as a collective religious duty, since medical care is a religious necessity for society.

Given their basic beliefs, Muslims have certain concerns in practicing modern medicine. Since all life belongs to God, including the fetus in the womb from the moment of conception, Muslims generally reject all forms of abortion. Some forms of birth control have been allowed, at least by some Muslim thinkers, and many modern Muslim governments have adopted family planning measures. Artificial insemination is a complex issue for Muslims, though generally it has been allowed if the sperm is from the woman's husband; otherwise it would fall under the category of adultery. Doctors may not take life out of mercy, but likewise life should not be prolonged by futile means without any lifelike quality. Traditional Islamic scholars have banned organ transplants because that mutilates the body. However, recent Islamic thinking, as exemplified in the *Islamic Code of Medical Ethics*, has allowed careful use of organ donations, pointing to the Islamic principle that the needs of the living have precedence over those of the dead.

Art in Islamic Worship and Life

Islamic art reflects the various cultures of the world that have been receptive to transformation through Islam and, thus, there is a great deal of cultural diversity. Yet the basic simplicity and universality of Islam radiate through artistic expressions in all parts of the Muslim world.

The Quran and the Hadith repeat the Jewish prohibition of making images and even strengthen it. The Quran insists that nothing in the created world is like God. Thus, not only representational art but also even metaphoric imaging of the divine in words is prohibited. Generally Islamic art has avoided not just representations of God but also all forms of representational art. It is said that on Judgment Day God will command those who made images now to bring them alive; failing, they will be punished in the Fire.

There has been some use of representational art in Islamic societies, of course, particularly for secular purposes, such as decorative painting on ceramics or book illustrations. Illustrative painting has been most used in Iran and in India. A special branch of Islamic painting is the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad on his night journey through the heavens, mounted on the steed Buraq; on these paintings Muhammad's face is usually covered or left blank. The strong sense of avoiding representations of the Prophet and the close companions was demonstrated in a recent film about the career of Muhammad, in which Muhammad and the close companions are represented only by voice, never by visible characters; the action is carried on by characters somewhat distant from the Prophet.

In place of representational art, Islamic culture has richly developed other art forms: decoration, calligraphy, architecture, poetry, and literature. One way to avoid representational art is to give prominence to abstract design, straight lines, angles, and intricate geometrical patterns on a flat plane, giving a sense of clarity and order. An important decorative form is arabesque, lines depicting an endless continuation of leaves, palmettes, and sometimes animal-like motifs growing out of each other. So geometric designs and arabesque are used together, providing an expression of life and growth but an overall framework of order and clear meaning. Geometric patterns and arabesque are often combined with calligraphy, serving well to express spiritual reality rather than the material and concrete world, conveying the rationality, clarity, and universality of the Muslim faith.

Since the Muslim tradition places high importance on the word of the Quran, the art of calligraphy has been richly cultivated, rendering the divine word visible in countless artistic variations of the Arabic script. Calligraphy is the central dictum of Muslim art, preserving and conveying the unchanging, eternal words of God given to humans. The divine words are woven in brocade, carved in wood and stone, painted on ceramics, and emerging from mosaics on mosque walls from Baghdad to Cordova. There are many styles of calligraphic scripts, and often the script is combined with arabesques and geometric designs to draw the eye and the mind to the divine word cradled within, calling for thoughtful reflection. For example, the *bismillah* ("In the name of Allah") may be written in such a way as to convey the shape of a bird or a beast; and the ninety-nine names of God may form a calligraphic mosque on a poster.

The mosque is the crowning Islamic creation in the field of architecture. The Ka'bah at Mecca, the first and primary sacred building, is a simple cubelike structure, and the mosque of the Prophet at Medina was also simple and

practical, a gathering place for believers to pray and study. Mosques differ all over the world, but their grandeur expresses the glory of God and their openness and light symbolize the apprehension of God's truth. All mosques have certain common features: a mihrab, a niche in the wall indicating the direction toward Mecca; a minbar or pulpit for the sermon at congregational prayer on Friday; and a minaret, a tower or spire from which the call to prayer goes out to the community.

The arts of poetry and literature have been very heavily influenced by the Quran itself, the supreme example of the artistic word. An early narrative art was the biography of the Prophet, and soon many narratives were produced about the sayings and events in the lives of Muhammad and the saints. Poetry has been an especially influential art in Islam, as from the beginnings of the Islamic movement Muslims gave voice to their religious vision in poetry. Especially in the mystical Sufi movement, poets used Arabic, Persian, and Turkish poetry to express emotional, intimate, passionate love for God. The Iraqi woman mystic Rabi'ah (d. 801) and other early Sufi poets gave voice to the mystical longing for God, the pain of separation, and the bliss of union. Perhaps the greatest poetic luminary was Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), who composed some 35,000 lyrical couplets in Persian. The great Arabic poet Ibn al-Farid (1182–1235) developed poetry to a high form of spiritual expression, as in this poetic description of the mystic vision:

> . . . the vision blest
> Was granted to my prayers. . . .
> The while amazed between
> His beauty and His majesty
> I stood in silent ecstasy
> Revealing that which o'er my spirit came and went.
> Lo! in His face commingled
> Is every charm and grace:
> The whole of beauty singled
> Into a perfect face
> Beholding Him would cry:
> "There is no god but He and He is the most High."[4]

The impulse of worshiping God frequently in daily prayer and in all aspects of life has led to the cultivation of many other arts and crafts in Islamic communities. To create prayer rugs and decorative cloths, countless artisans across the Muslim world dedicate their days to dyeing fabrics and weaving beautiful rugs and other embroidered cloths. The art of creating beautiful mosaics to adorn mosques and other buildings has been passed down since earliest Islamic times and is still cultivated by artists today. Other artists have worked at manuscript and book illumination, lovingly adorning the sacred Word and the narrations of the prophets and saints. Some Muslim societies, such as those in India and Pakistan, have even cultivated music and song to celebrate religious festivals—though other Muslim societies, such as those influenced by the Wahhabi movement, have tended to avoid music and song in connection with religious activities.

The use of the arts in Islam has given real aesthetic focus to the concepts of the faith and brought these rational ideas into the realm of the everyday life of the people. Overall the vision of the Quran has inspired Muslims to create a distinctive style of art that is diverse around the world but still unified at its basic core.

THE LIFE OF SHARI'AH: SOCIETY AND ETHICS

How should we live? The Muslim answer is as simple and universal as the Jewish and Christian answer. The Muslim should live as one who belongs to the ummah, the worldwide community of Muslims, following the guidance of the Shari'ah, the Law.

Social Structure of Islam

The Universal Ummah The word *ummah* is difficult to translate. It has elements of a community, a people, a nation, and a religion. According to the Quran, originally all people were one ummah, but then they fell into variance (10:19). Prophets were sent by God to the different ummahs. The ummah of each prophet received true revelation from God and, thus, they were Muslims insofar as they submitted to that revelation and lived according to it. Most of these communities, however, forgot the true revelation and lapsed into unbelief and sin.

God gave to Muhammad, the final prophet, the mission of establishing a new ummah, which would be the social embodiment of God's design for all humankind and which eventually would reunite all humankind into one ummah.

An early example of Muslim architecture is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

The peoples of Arabia were divided into tribal loyalties, and this greatly hindered Muhammad's work in Mecca. So the decisive moment in the creation of the ummah was the Hijra, the emigration to Medina, where for the first time there arose an ummah that was unified in worship and faith. In making the Hijra, Muhammad and the Muslims were moving against their own kin in Mecca to an alien center outside; faith-solidarity was now sharply pitted against blood-solidarity. The Emigrants had to rely on the assistance of people outside their tribes, the Helpers of Medina. The Constitution of Medina clearly identified the new community as an ummah bound together by faith and submission to God and his prophet, showing that the bond of faith had replaced tribal loyalty.

In Medina, the political and social structure was totally Islamicized, and that set the pattern for the ummah. There is no separation between the secular and the religious in Islam, between the political and the spiritual, between state and church. The ummah is all-embracing, based on the foundation of the Quran and the Law drawn from the Quran.

As Islam expanded under the caliphs, a large territory came under the immediate jurisdiction of the ummah. This is called the Dar al-Islam, the Abode of Islam, inside of which infidels could not be tolerated. But the ummah is not limited to the area of the Dar al-Islam. The ummah is universal, and all who submit to God and recognize the Prophet are equal in this brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam. Equality and unity are of central importance. No one Muslim, no matter in what position, has rights of precedence over another Muslim; all are equal before God. In the days of Caliph 'Umar, the powerful governor of Egypt had a son who was beaten by an Egyptian commoner in a horse-racing contest; the son struck the commoner saying, "Don't you know I am the son of the governor?" And the governor imprisoned the commoner for a time. But when he was released, the commoner went to Medina and appealed to 'Umar. 'Umar recalled both the governor and his son, and after they confessed he ordered the commoner to beat them both[5]. Although there may be differences of position or wealth, all Muslims are equal with respect to justice under God's law.

Since God's unity is the bedrock of Islamic belief, the ummah also is an expression of that unity. Ideally the ummah demonstrates the fundamental unity of the human race. The Quran states, "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that

you may know one another" (49:13). The rituals of Islam provide dramatic experience of the oneness of the whole Islamic community. Five times a day Muslims everywhere on earth face the same center of the world and say the same prayers. And in the pilgrimage to Mecca, Muslims of both genders and of all races, nations, and language groups come together as one, representing the whole human race. The ummah is not called out to be a special people separate from the whole human race; it is the ideal form that all humankind is designed to be.

Social Structure and Leadership The ummah is universal and worldwide. But it takes concrete form in the various Islamic nations and especially in the communities of Muslims all over who group themselves together as mosque assemblies. Although Muhammad and the first four caliphs were seen as leaders of the one ummah, down through the centuries Islam has linked together with a variety of nations and empires, so that today there is no one worldwide unified ruling authority. Muslims today live in a variety of political structures, from Islamic states like Pakistan and Iran to secular states like Turkey; and a significant number of Muslims live in small Muslim communities scattered throughout the Western nations. Yet there is a remarkable unity of Islamic belief and practice throughout the worldwide ummah. Most Muslims consider themselves to be Sunnites, following one of the four orthodox schools of law codified by the Islamic scholars in the generations following the time of Muhammad. The Shi'ites are a significant minority, making up about 15 percent of the world population of Muslims and following their own schools of law. Yet for the most part Sunnites and Shi'ites recognize each other as equal and true practitioners of the Muslim way.

There is no clergy or priesthood in the ummah. The ruling family of Saudi Arabia has assumed responsibility for the holy places there, exercising some control over who is considered to be a Muslim in terms of who is allowed to enter Mecca on the pilgrimage. But there is no person or body who has authority over the whole ummah. Since Islam is a path of knowledge, the most respected leaders are the scholars, the *'ulama* (sing., *'alim*), who study the Quran and the Hadith and are responsible for determining the application of the law. Among the 'ulama the *mufti* is recognized as a legal expert who can be consulted for a formal legal opinion on a particular question pertaining to, for example, marriage, divorce, or inheritance. Another important figure is the *qadi*, the religious judge who is appointed by the political leader and carries out justice in matters of religious law. The Shi'ite religious scholars in Iran, called **mullas**, are granted an extraordinarily high level of respect and authority in all matters pertaining to religious law—which, in an Islamic republic like Iran, means authority over all matters of human society.

On the local level, most mosque communities contract with a learned Muslim to be the imam, the spiritual leader of worship and teaching in the mosque. Any Muslim has the right to lead prayers and to teach others. But it is helpful if the mosque has a recognized scholar as imam to teach, preach at the Friday prayers, and give spiritual guidance to the people in a variety of matters.

Women in Religious Leadership Muslim tradition has been quite strict in separating women from men in public religious activities, so religious leadership has almost exclusively been reserved for men. Although women have equality with men, according to the Quran, the roles of women are understood to be quite different. Laws and cultural customs about seclusion have contributed to keeping women from public activities; instead, their roles have focused overwhelmingly on the family and the home and on the religious training of children. Women do lead prayers when a group of women prays together.

Of course, there have been strong, well-known female religious leaders in Muslim history, starting with Khadijah, Muhammad's strong and resourceful wife. His later wives also were highly respected and talented. Hafsah, daughter of 'Umar, was literate and contributed to the collection of the revelations given to Muhammad. And his beloved young wife 'Aisha was a strong leader, not afraid to enter into the conflicts that developed after Muhammad's death; it was she who supplied many of the *hadiths* (reports) about Muhammad's sayings and deeds. Muhammad's daughter Fatima, married to his cousin 'Ali and mother of his grandsons, was highly revered as a leader in women's spirituality. And there have been numerous women spiritual leaders, saints, and mystics—such as Rabi'ah, mentioned earlier.

In modern times there are many examples of Muslim women who exercise leadership in a variety of important roles, as political leaders (even heads of state), writers, teachers, scholars, doctors, engineers, and much more. While women have been restricted from public religious leadership positions, they exert much influence in the

Muslim community. Some leading Muslim women today are quite Westernized. But many other modern women are turning more toward traditional Islamic values to reaffirm their identity as Muslim women. They find vitality not in Western patterns of liberation but within the framework of Muslim tradition. Taking full advantage of educational and professional opportunities, yet choosing to remain within traditional Islamic patterns of society, these women are attempting to express a modern vision of Islamic womanhood distinct from Western models.

The Way of Shari'ah

How should we live? Christianity turned away from the Jewish idea that God's law directly governs and guides all conduct; rather, faith in Christ means that love is the motivating power, following the law in freedom. In many ways the Muslim tradition rejects the Christian view and returns closely to the Jewish view of Torah. The Shari'ah is divinely given, complete and perfect in all its details. The highest human good is to follow the path outlined in the law, omitting no details no matter how small. Humans were created to fulfill the divine design, and that design finds its expression in the Shari'ah.

Basic Principles of the Shari'ah The Quran, of course, comes from God, revealed through the Prophet Muhammad. But where does the Shari'ah, the massive religious legislation that governs all aspects of Muslim life, come from? This also comes from God, Muslims say, because it is drawn from the Holy Book. Since law is so important to Muslims, the great Islamic thinkers spent their creative energies elucidating the legal structure of Islam, while Christian thinkers were spending their time on theological issues.

There are actually two basic sources for the Shari'ah: the Quran and the Hadith (the collection of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad). Many duties of human life find direct, explicit expression in the Quran. But, although the Quran is God's perfect revelation, it is not large enough to state explicitly everything that humans should do in life in all situations. What is implicit in the Quran, or unclear in our limited understanding, is made explicit in the Hadith. Muhammad's close companions reported what he said and did in all circumstances, and these reports convey the example (**sunnah**) of Muhammad as the second source of law. To distinguish the reliable reports from those that are not so reliable, Muslim scholars elaborated a scientific, scholarly method of scrutinizing the "chain" (**isnad**) of people who passed on the report. If the chain can be linked securely back to a close companion of the Prophet, it is reliable and can be used as a basis for Shari'ah.

But even the Hadith does not specify what is to be done in all situations. As new situations arose, the law had to be searched and interpreted to meet the new needs. So Muslim scholars cultivated the method of "analogy" (**qiyas**), likening the new situation to one mentioned in the Quran or the Hadith and, thus, drawing legal conclusions. Analogy is a very creative undertaking, so finally it has to be checked, verified, and codified by the consensus (**ijma'**) of the recognized legal scholars—for Muhammad had said that his people will never agree on an error. In this way, from the Quran and the Hadith, by means of analogy and consensus, the whole body of Islamic law was formed and put in place as the divine pattern for human life.

We should not let the process of developing the Shari'ah obscure the fundamental truth that the Shari'ah represents God's total design for life. The Shari'ah has been revealed by the same God who made the whole world for the sake of humans. The guidance supplied in the law is, therefore, a regulation of life in the best interest of humans, showing us the best way to live to fulfill the highest potential. God has not given anything that is useless or unnecessary, and humans should use all their faculties, powers, and resources in such a way that they can reap the highest benefits from them. The Shari'ah, then, is the most humanizing force in the world. It is not in conflict with other true humanizing forces of religion and science, but it is the final, all-encompassing, perfect guide.

Because the Shari'ah was worked out by scholars in different parts of the Muslim world, a number of different schools of law developed with slight differences. The Hanafi school, dominant today in central and western Asia, northern Egypt, and India, is the most liberal and flexible. The Maliki school, prominent today in North Africa and southern Egypt, and the Shafi'i school, in Malaysia and East Africa, are generally considered middle of the road. The Hanbali school, dominant in Saudi Arabia, is the most conservative and strict. But in practice there are no fundamental differences among these schools, and all are regarded by one another as fully orthodox. The Shi'ites have three schools of law, differing from the Sunnite schools mainly in

authority of the imam, the recognition of temporary marriage (a limited time of marriage specified in the marriage contract), a stricter divorce law, and more provision for female relatives in the inheritance law.

Muslim Ethics in Practice Islamic law is learned, in its basics, by all Muslims so they can live their lives properly. But how can there be definite divine rules about every aspect of human life? The Islamic answer is to classify all acts into five basic categories or principles that allow for a range of shading and flexibility. Some duties and acts are *required* (*fard*) of all Muslims; performing them brings reward and omitting them brings punishment. Again, some acts are strictly *forbidden* (**haram**), and doing them brings punishment. Some acts are *recommended* but not required, and performance of them is rewarded. Some acts are *disapproved* but not forbidden or punished. And, finally, some acts are *indifferent*, neither rewarded nor punished. The Pillar of Prayer, for example, is required; drinking alcohol is forbidden. Recommended acts would be, for example, saying extra prayers or visiting Medina after the pilgrimage. The categories of indifferent acts and disapproved acts allow for some disagreement between legal scholars and among the schools of law. An action may be held disapproved by one but indifferent by another, or something considered to be forbidden by one scholar might be thought of as merely disapproved by another.

There are other elements of flexibility in Islamic jurisprudence. The law only applies to those who are *rashid*, that is, free Muslims of legal age and sane. Non-Muslims have complete legal freedom provided they do not interfere with the religious interests of Muslims. Furthermore, a fundamental principle of religious law is intent. Normally forbidden actions are permissible under duress. For example, drinking wine or having illegal intercourse under threat of death is permissible; refusal under these circumstances would be forbidden. Punishments for forbidden actions can only be carried out if very stringent requirements of proof of wrongdoing are met—for example, four eyewitnesses are required in a charge of unlawful sexual intercourse.

A good part of Islamic law is focused on the family, for this is the broad arena in which the individual lives most of his or her life. In fact, for women in traditional Muslim societies, social contacts outside the extended family are few. Marriage is a duty carried out on the basis of a legal contract consented to by both parties. Sexual expression is considered good and healthy, but it is strictly reserved for marriage. All other forms of sex are forbidden and punished: premarital and extramarital sex, homosexuality, prostitution, bestiality, and so forth. To control the natural sexual urges, Islamic law forbids intermingling of sexes (unless they are nonmarriageable relatives) in any social gathering or even in schools. Furthermore, the law requires modesty in dress; the most conservative law school holds that no more than a woman's face and hands should be visible when she is outside the home. Men are also to clothe themselves modestly.

Divorce is permitted in Islam, although Muhammad said that God considers divorce to be the most detestable of permitted things. Traditionally the man could divorce his wife by the formula of repudiation, uttering "I divorce you" three times, usually with a prescribed waiting period between the utterances. Once the third repudiation is uttered, it is irrevocable and the man has no more claim on the woman. If they for some reason want to be married again, the woman must first be married to someone else and then divorced.

What is the position of women in Islamic law? Men and women are equal before God, according to the Quran (16:97). The woman, like the man, has standing as a legal individual, retaining her property to use as she sees fit. But women have a different role from men. Whereas the man's role is to work and support the family, the woman's place is in the home, providing care and stability for family life. If a woman must work outside the home, it should be in certain types of occupations appropriate for women, such as teaching or nursing. A Muslim man is permitted to marry four wives, whereas a Muslim woman may have only one husband. Muslims point out that one basic reason for polygamy is to ensure that all women can be married and, thus, fulfill themselves in family life. Furthermore, in actuality very few Muslim men have more than one wife, for Islamic law dictates that a man must treat his wives equally both in sexual relationship and in financial support.

There are other aspects of Islamic law in which women seem of lesser value than men. For example, certain legal proceedings require two male witnesses or one male and two female witnesses, and a woman relative generally receives only one-half the inheritance of an equal male relative. Furthermore, a Muslim man is permitted to marry a non-Muslim monotheistic woman, but this permission is not extended to a Muslim woman. The Quran seemingly subjugates wives to their husbands:

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah made the one of them to excel the other"—and men may banish wives who are disobedient from the marital bed and beat them (4:34). Muslims explain these seeming inequalities on the basis of the particular roles of women and men in society and in the family. For example, with respect to inheritance law, husbands are required by Islamic law to support their wives and families, whereas wives are not required to contribute to the financial support of the family, and so it makes a certain sense that sons should receive a greater inheritance share than daughters. Since men have a more public role while women's activities take place within the family, Muslims say, it is appropriate that the husband should have the role of making decisions and governing the life of the family.

When the question of the status of women in Islam is brought up, Muslims point out that, whereas in Christendom and in most parts of the world, until very recently women were considered little more than property with no legal rights, Islamic law instituted by Muhammad lifted the status of women and gave them equal rights with men. Certainly, the Quran presents a strong basic view of the equality of women and men. This does not mean, however, that they should have the same function as men in society, for in God's divine pattern women fulfill their high potential in maintaining the well-being of the family.

Many modern Muslim leaders and governments have brought about reforms in those aspects of Muslim traditional law and cultural practices that subjugated women. Notable among these reforms have been the discouragement of child marriage; restricting the taking of more than one wife, allowing stipulations about this to be written into the marriage contract; and moving toward more equity in divorce rights for women. Women may, for example, be able to initiate divorce on grounds such as the husband's physical incapacity, desertion, failure to provide support, cruelty, and the like.

As Muslims respond to the pressures of the modern world, some scholars are studying the Quran and the Hadith anew to reinterpret the role of women in modern Muslim society. Women are found in various professions, providing strong leadership in Muslim communities, though not yet in public religious leadership roles. Although many Muslim women have become Westernized in dress, there is a tendency among some Muslim women today to reassert their Muslim identity by choosing more traditional dress—to recover their own spiritual sources rather than bowing to Western secular ideas, and to give themselves more freedom and confidence in their new public roles without the sexual innuendos and sexual harassment often associated with Western dress and social intercourse. The role of women—equal with men, but different—is very complex in Muslim tradition. Much thought and care are being devoted to this subject today, and Muslim women will certainly increasingly shape Islamic life and thought.[6]

With respect to personal life, the Shari'ah forbids the use of things that are injurious to one's physical, mental, or moral life. Besides alcohol and drugs, there are forbidden foods, falling into four basic categories: carrion, blood, pork, and anything sacrificed to another god. By carrion is meant beasts of prey and anything that died without being slaughtered properly, such as by old age, illness, or being killed improperly (by another animal or by a hunter, for example). People are required to keep the body clean, and one should not wear excessively costly clothes or jewelry.

The rights of other people in society are especially guarded by the Shari'ah. Lying, cheating, theft, bribery, forgery, and other means of illegal gain at the expense of others are forbidden. And gambling and games of chance are forbidden because in them someone wins at the expense of others. Likewise forbidden are various forms of exploitation, such as monopoly, hoarding, black marketeering, withholding land from cultivation, and the like. Usury—that is, charging interest on loans—is also considered a form of gain at the expense of others and, thus, is forbidden. While this makes capitalistic endeavors difficult, it promotes solidarity and cooperation with respect to the use of financial resources. Islamic banking endeavors have come up with creative methods of providing necessary funding without charging interest, with the lender then sharing in the profits (and the risks) of economic enterprises. Another device by which the Muslim tradition prevents the excessive accumulation of wealth by one party is inheritance law, which requires that the wealth be distributed to all eligible relatives rather than being kept in one estate. Muslims consider wealth as God's blessing; it is not to be hoarded or squandered but rather used to the betterment of oneself and others.

Part of the duty of Muslims is the establishment of social justice, and that involves them in the political arena. In recent years certain Muslim political radicals have

committed acts of terrorism, claiming religious justification for their violence. But most Muslims do not agree with those radicals, holding that suicide and killing innocent people are contrary to Islamic teachings. Sometimes warfare may be necessary to enforce justice, of course. The Shari'ah includes legislation on the justification and conduct of war. In general it may be said that the only permissible reason for warfare is striving in the cause of God—which is what the term *jihad* (often translated "holy war") means. This means that wars for land, resources, power, wealth, and all the rest are prohibited. Striving in the cause of God means enforcing God's law about equality and justice for all. Thus, the Muslim tradition has a kind of "just war" idea in that Muslims are obligated to take up arms in self-defense or in defense of others who are being oppressed and treated unjustly. Such warfare, however, is strictly regulated: negotiations must always be made first with the other side, booty may not be taken, and innocent people may not be injured.

Transformation of Human Society

Muslims have a vision for society, and the contours of that vision find expression in the Shari'ah. Since this law is God's final and perfect design, it is the responsibility of Muslims to implement it for all societies of the world. And since the Islamic principles of faith are the same universal principles that have been revealed by all God's prophets, it is the duty of Muslims to convince all other peoples to submit to this truth of Islam. In other words, Muslims have the duty to engage in *da'wah*, missionary activities directed toward the Islamicization of the world, both in the laws of society and in the faith of all people.

But the Islamic vision of the good life under the law has one important difference from the Jewish or Christian vision. To live the Shari'ah in *all* its aspects requires that one live under a Muslim government. In fact, ideally there should be one Muslim ruler (the caliph) who rules over the whole Dar al-Islam. Since the Shari'ah contains provisions that can only be carried out by a government, it is not possible to follow the complete life of Islam while living under a non-Muslim ruler.

Thus, the Islamicization of society ideally means establishing an Islamic government. The notion of *jihad*, "striving" in the path of God, plays a part at this point. It refers to conquering all forces that oppose God's will, starting with one's own sins and unbelief. Since the realms of society not ruled by Muslim governments do not conform to God's law, in theory there is a perpetual state of jihad between the Dar al-Islam and the infidel society, the Dar al-Harb. Some leaders of the Islamic resurgence today would direct that struggle also against modern secular governments in Muslim countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Syria, and the like, since these governments do not rule by the Shari'ah. Some Muslims are attempting to establish Shari'ah law in places such as Nigeria and Indonesia. The Islamic ideal would be for the whole world to come under Islamic rule and Islamic law. This would bring great benefits even for non-Muslims, according to some Muslim thinkers, since it would keep them from forbidden acts and provide a peaceful, orderly society without all the evils of modern, secular society.

The Spiritual Mission of Islam Spreading Islamic law does not mean religious coercion, which is expressly forbidden in the Quran (2:256). The Shari'ah permits some religions to continue even in the Dar al-Islam. Those who are monotheists and possess a sacred scripture are known as People of the Book—this includes Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians; although their faith is faulty, they are nonetheless acceptable to God. They can live peacefully within Muslim domains by paying a special tax. But, at least according to traditional law, polytheists must either convert to monotheism or flee; otherwise they face imprisonment or execution.

The missionary impulse in Islam comes from the knowledge that this is the final religion with the final, perfect revelation of God. While God gave revelation of the same faith through prophets in all other lands, the Arabic Quran is the last such revelation and is intended for all peoples universally. Submitting to the divine trust, Muslims feel compelled to share this revelation with all others.

But how should Muslims share this revelation with others? God's great gifts to humans are intelligence, free will, and speech. Speech is the means of sharing the Quran with others. God's gift of free will means no coercion or forcing people to accept Islam. Rather, God's truth should be spread in a rational way, appealing to human intelligence, allowing others to become convinced by their reason and submit to this final truth. If people really consider Islam in a rational, free way, Muslims believe, they will see that it is the highest truth of God and human existence. Mawdudi says,

This is Islam, the natural religion of man, the religion which is not associated with any person, people, period or place. It is the way of nature, the religion of *man.* In every age, in every country and among every people, all God-knowing and truth-loving men have believed and lived this very religion. They were all Muslims, irrespective of whether they called that way Islam.[7]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 In what ways is the Prayer the heart of Muslim life? Describe the performance of the Pillar of Prayer.
2 Explain the Pillars of Fasting and of Alms-giving. How do the central motifs of submission to God and the oneness of the Muslim community come to expression in these practices?
3 Describe the various rituals of the Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) and their meaning for Muslims.
4 Describe the traditional rituals associated with marriage and with death in Islamic communities.
5 Discuss the central Muslim religious concerns about healing and medicine.
6 Explain some of the basic principles of Islamic art. What are some of the main artistic forms used for ritual and worship in Islam?
7 What is the ummah? What kind of leadership is there in the ummah?
8 What are the traditional views about women in religious leadership roles in Islam? Describe some examples of strong women leaders in Muslim history.
9 On what is the Shari'ah based? How do analogy (*qiyas*) and consensus (*ijma'*) fit in?
10 How is it possible for the Shari'ah to govern all aspects of life? Describe how it functions in concrete situations in everyday life.
11 What are the basic aspects of Muslim law about the family and the relationship between men and women? Is marriage considered to be eternal? Is divorce permitted?
12 Compare the role of religious law in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

KEY TERMS: ISLAM

Abbasids classical Muslim dynasty, ruling at Baghdad, eighth to thirteenth centuries C.E.
Abu Bakr companion of the Prophet Muhammad and first caliph (d. 634)
al-Ghazali great thinker (1058–1111 C.E.) who synthesized orthodox Islamic thought and Sufism
'Ali nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the fourth caliph (d. 661); considered by Shi'ites to be the first imam or successor to Muhammad
Allah "the God"; Quranic designation for the one God
caliph "deputy," also "successor" to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of Islam
Dar al-Harb *see* Dar al-Islam
Dar al-Islam "abode of Islam"; territories of the ummah under Muslim control, whereas the rest of the world is the Dar al-Harb, "abode of warfare"
da'wah missionary activities directed toward spreading Islam
dhikr "remembrance"; spiritual exercises in Sufism focusing the consciousness on God
Five Pillars required Muslim rituals of serving God: Shahadah (confession), Salat (prayer), Zakat (alms-giving), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage)
Hadith a saying or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad transmitted through a trustworthy chain of reporters; the collection of hadiths
Hagar wife of Abraham, mother of Ishmael, and ancestress of the Muslims
Hajj annual pilgrimage to Mecca
haram forbidden, such as certain actions or food
hidden imam in Shi'ism, the last Imam (successor to Muhammad) who disappeared into a state of occultation and will return in the future
Hijra emigration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.
Husayn son of 'Ali, killed at Karbalah (680); considered by Shi'ites as an Imam (successor to the Prophet Muhammad) and a great martyr
'id "feast" or festival in Islam; the two major festivals are 'Id al-adha (Feast of Sacrifice) during the Hajj month and 'Id al-fitr (Feast of Breaking the Ramadan Fast)
ihram state of ritual purity and consecration appropriate for entering the sacred precincts of Mecca on the Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage)
ijma' "consensus"; for formulating Muslim law, consensus among the legal scholars is necessary
ijtihad independent legal reasoning in Islam; one who does this is a mujtahid
imam Islamic scholar and leader, especially in ritual prayer; for Shi'ites, the proper successors to the Prophet are called Imams

iman "faith," complete certitude about the truth of Islam
Ishmael son of Abraham and Hagar, ancestor of the Muslims
isnad the chain of transmitters for a particular hadith in Islam
jihad "striving" for religious perfection and for God's cause including bearing arms in defense of Islam if necessary
Judgment Day the day on which God will judge all according to their deeds
Ka'bah the cube-shaped stone shrine in the Great Mosque at Mecca, focal point of prayer and pilgrimage for Muslims
kafir an unbeliever, in Islamic terms
Khadija the first wife (d. 619) of the Prophet Muhammad
Kharijites "seceders"; strict moralistic sect of early Muslims
mihrab niche in the mosque wall indicating the direction to Mecca
minbar pulpit from which the sermon is given during the Friday prayer in the Islamic mosque
mosque (masjid) place of communal worship in Islam
muezzin (muadhdhin) person who calls the people to ritual prayer, chanting out the call from atop a minaret or mosque roof
Mughal Muslim dynasty established by the Mongols in India
mulla Persian word for learned Muslim teacher and expounder of the law
Muslim one who has surrendered to God in accepting the authority of the Quran
Mu'tazilites school in the classical period of Islam that accepted reason as a primary criterion for establishing beliefs
Ottoman caliphate ruling much of the Muslim world from Istanbul from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries C.E.
prophets messengers through whom God has given revelation to all peoples, culminating with Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets
qiyas "analogy" in legal argumentation and decision making in Islam
Quran "recitation," primarily the revelation sent down by God upon the Prophet Muhammad; the Holy Book
Ramadan sacred month in which Muslims perform the Fast
Safavid Muslim dynasty in Iran beginning in the sixteenth century, featuring rule by the shahs
Salat required Muslim ritual of prayer five times daily
Sawm required Muslim fasting during the month of Ramadan
Shahadah the Muslim formula bearing witness to the unity of God: "I testify that there is no God but God; I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God"
Shari'ah Islamic law, based on the Quran and on the sunnah of the Prophet
Shi'ites the "faction" of 'Ali that believes that 'Ali and his descendants are the proper successors of the Prophet Muhammad; today, one of the two main divisions in Islam, representing about one-sixth of the world's Muslims
shirk "association"; Muslim term for the great sin of idolatry or associating something else with God
Sufi one who follows the mystical path of Islam
sunnah "custom" or "way of acting," primarily of the Prophet Muhammad; the Prophet's sunnah is known through the hadiths
Sunnites term for the Muslim majority, those who acknowledge the first four caliphs and the interpretation of the Quran and the Prophet's sunnah by the orthodox 'ulama (religious scholars)
tawhid Muslim term for maintaining the unity of God
Twelvers the largest group within the Muslim Shi'ites, those who hold there have been twelve Imams; also called the Imamis
'ulama the class of learned Muslim legal scholars who study and apply the religious sciences
'Umar the second caliph in Islamic history (d. 644)
Umayyad dynasty ruling Islam from Damascus from 661 to 750 C.E.
ummah a community having a common religion; especially the Muslim community
'Uthman the third caliph in Islamic history (d. 656)
Wahhabi strict reform movement founded in Arabia in the eighteenth century and influential throughout Islam
Zakat the required Muslim practice of alms-giving or wealth-sharing

Part 3 Ongoing Explorations on the Sacred Paths

Like all aspects of human culture, religious traditions are dynamic. Though some traditions seem to stay the same for long periods of time, in reality change and transformation are always going on, as each new generation accepts the tradition and lives in it under new life circumstances. Our present age is a time of intensive interaction and communication between all traditional religious communities. And the world today poses critical and intensive challenges to all human communities and, thus, to all religious traditions. The search for meaning and hope is an ongoing one, and the paths people follow today often take new and surprising turns.

As we explored the different religious traditions of the world in this book, we had occasion to look at some of the continuing concerns and new directions being pursued by people within these traditions. Overall, as we have seen, there is a significant sense of revitalization and heightened relevance in most of the sacred paths today. As we conclude our journey in this book, we highlight the ongoing nature of humankind's religious adventure by focusing on two important dimensions: new religious movements, and increasing dialogue and cooperation between religious communities.

New religious movements are not exclusive to our modern age, of course. It seems significant today that numbers of people have become disaffected with their traditional religious practices and have begun to seek out alternate paths. It would, of course, be impossible to try and look at the enormous number of such new religious movements throughout the world today, many of them quite small in numbers of adherents and others surprisingly large. We can get some sense of the nature of these movements by focusing on some better-known examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Western world.

A significant, fairly new emphasis among the world's religious communities today is the attention being given to conversation and cooperation between the different groups. In our shrinking global village, there is increasing information about people of other religions and increasing personal contact. In the face of various social crises, it has become urgent for people of different faith communities to work together for the common good. Many religious individuals have come to the new realization that deep, sincere dialogue with people of other faiths can be helpful in following one's own spiritual path.

Chapter 15

New Religious Movements

SPIRITUAL SEARCHING AND ALTERNATIVE SACRED PATHS

In this study, we have looked at the mainstream of each religious tradition for a basic orientation to the rich landscape of humankind's sacred paths. But each religion is a living, growing, and changing path for people living their lives and looking for spiritual meaning and fulfillment. And so in every age, in every tradition, there have been changes and transformations, new groups evolving, alternative movements vying for people's commitment. Searching, reforming, revitalizing, creating new paths—these tendencies have always been central to the human religious story. Most of the world religions—and many paths that have vanished along the way—began as transformations of the dominant religious path, or as new alternative religious movements.

Today, change and transformation are central characteristics of religion. And so, as we complete our journey of exploration, we pause to take note of some of the new and alternative movements in the contemporary religious world. Although many of these groups are small in numbers compared to the major world religions, they often have been highly visible and influential—and controversial, in some cases.

Cults, Sects, and Alternative Religious Movements

Social scientists have developed terminology to describe the role of religious movements within the larger society, using terms like *sect* and *cult*. Whereas the dominant religious tradition (the "church," for example) is accepted as mainstream in a society, groups that split off from that mainstream because of their distinctive emphases are sometimes called sects. They still operate within the basic framework of the religious tradition, but because of their special focus and their tendency to separate from the others, they are differentiated from the mainstream.

The term cult, as used by social scientists, generally refers to an alternative minority within a dominant society, following an altogether different religious structure, alien to the prevailing religious community. Such groups may be transplanted from outside, or they can emerge as innovations based on new religious experiences by charismatic leaders and deeply committed followers.

Unfortunately, the term cult is no longer a neutral sociological term but has become highly charged with other connotations. To some Christian groups, cults include all new movements that have departed from orthodox Christian teachings and are, therefore, to be condemned. A secular anticult movement has been fighting against many new religious movements because, it is claimed, they practice brainwashing and mind control over their adherents. On these grounds, any religious movement that is different and strange can be dismissed as a cult that threatens church and society.

Now it is true that several cult movements have turned out to be destructive. One thinks of the People's Temple movement led by Jim Jones, resulting in the mass suicide of 912 adherents at Jonestown in Guyana in 1978. Then there was the violent episode of the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh, resulting in tragic mass destruction at their stronghold in Waco, Texas, in 1993. The Heaven's Gate community shocked the world by group suicide in 1996 in an apparent attempt to reach higher spiritual development by connecting with a nearby comet. And Aum Shinri-kyo, an apocalyptic new religious movement in Japan, shocked Japanese society by a sarin gas attack in the subway system in 1994. Yet these movements, and others with some of the

same characteristics, are exceptional, deviant groups, and it is certainly wrong to lump all new religious movements together with them in a single "cult" category. Each new religious movement provides meaning and power that people live by, as do all the established world religions, and our first step is to take a sensitive look inside them and try to understand the vision of sacred life they provide.

Some Characteristics of the New Movements Though new religious movements are found across the whole religious landscape and may vary widely, there are a few typical characteristics that many have in common. They arise in a context of discontent and spiritual crisis. Some people find a loss of meaning in their own traditional path, or perhaps they never felt part of a path and are searching for something to fill the emptiness. The new movements respond to this discontent and searching, supplying a new or alternative meaning, identity, and spiritual purpose.

The new religious movements often tend to be *apocalyptic* in the sense of promising a new age, a spiritual transformation that will meet the crisis and bring fulfillment. Sometimes the promise is for a New Era for all humankind—a future of global salvation, beginning with the new order established by the founder. Often the benefits are not merely spiritual but also concrete and this-worldly. Many new movements focus strongly on individual benefits, especially on healing as well as personal transformation, fulfillment, and growth.

Typically, new movements center on strong founders—charismatic individuals who have had extraordinary spiritual experiences and revelations of higher truths. After the founder dies, the movement often goes through a period of crisis as leadership passes to successors and the original charisma becomes more organized and institutionalized. Schisms may occur, new groups may spin off, and the new movement gradually takes on established forms if it is to endure in passing on the founding traditions.

Some of the new groups are sectarian and, thus, rather narrowly focused. But most new movements are quite eclectic in their teachings and practices, drawing from a variety of religious sources, putting traditions together in a new way, and incorporating new insights from modern experiences.

Although some of these movements are antimodern, preferring traditional views of reality rather than the modern scientific worldview, many of the new movements readily embrace modern life, science, and technology. They often describe their spiritual practices and benefits in scientific, psychological, or even technological terms. They participate rather fully in modern-day structures of politics, economics, education, and the rest, following their spiritual path within the opportunities and demands of modern life.

Most of these groups excel in using all the modern techniques of communication. A striking recent development is the rapidly increasing use of the Internet with its bulletin boards, discussion lists, and newsgroups. Adherents, seekers, and interested onlookers can log on and engage in spirited discussions, literally around the globe, about various points of history, doctrine, and practice. Some groups are even experimenting with sessions of spiritual practice conducted via the Internet. This new phenomenon of religious discussion and participation in cyberspace will no doubt have a substantial impact in shaping the future of many religious movements, including the mainline traditions.

Rise of New Sectarian Movements

Sectarian groups are not really new religions, but we should take note of this phenomenon in the contemporary religious world. Occasionally, the transformations and new ideas advocated by some are resisted by the dominant religious community, and new sectarian groups have emerged, splitting off from the mainstream. Such sects hold fast to some special aspects of the traditional way but are separated from the mainstream because of their distinctive focus.

For example, a number of sectarian groups have arisen within American Christianity, in some cases becoming rather significant communities in their own right. The **Jehovah's Witnesses**, following a very strict, literal understanding of the Bible, have certain distinctive teachings about God and human life that separate them from other Christian groups. They hold that the doctrine of the Trinity is unbiblical—they believe in Jesus as the Son of God but not as Jehovah (God) himself. They meet regularly in "kingdom halls" for study and worship, and they give public testimony to the truth by engaging in door-to-door evangelism. Jehovah's Witnesses follow their distinctive faith and refuse to accommodate modern society—persisting, for example, in being pacifist and refusing blood transfusions.

Another well-established sectarian group within Christianity is the **Church of Christ Scientist**, following the

distinctive ideas of Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910) in interpreting the scriptures. They are thought by other Christians to be nonconventional, even though they consider themselves to be in the mainstream of Christian teachings. Mary Baker Eddy believed her teachings embodied the Divine Science represented in the continuing power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrated in Jesus' miracles but still operative. God is mind and life principle, she taught, the only reality; matter is an illusion resulting from inferior human thinking. Relying on the Divine Mind leads the believer toward spiritual growth in which the error is transformed and apparent sicknesses vanish.

New sectarian groups have grown up in many of the world's religions in modern times, as we have noted in earlier chapters, as people struggle with the challenges of modernity and seek to find special meaning in selective aspects of their traditional religious resources. And some of these groups have become strong and international in scope through their energetic evangelistic activities.

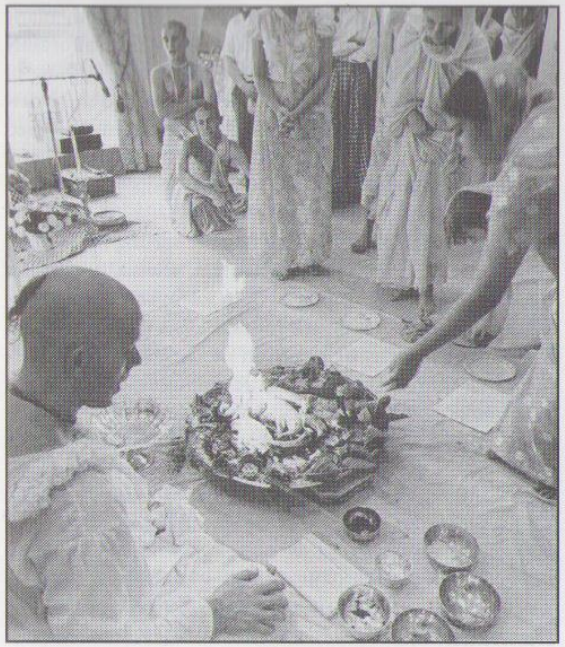
Attraction to Alternative Paths in the West

For some people of the Western world, spiritual searching leads them away from their own tradition of Christianity or Judaism to discover the depth of meaning in other traditional religious paths. In Europe and America, recent immigration has brought large numbers of ethnic communities from other parts of the world to live within Western society. People representing all the major world religions are now present, and some Westerners are attracted to these alternative spiritual paths. As Westerners join them and take on their practices and disciplines, new shapes and characteristics emerge. We have already taken note of the Black Muslim movement in America (Chapter 12). To many Westerners, the sacred paths of the East hold a particular fascination.

Hindu Movements in the West In America and Europe, there has been much interest in traditional and new forms of Hinduism, taught by a large array of masters, swamis, and gurus. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), disciple of the Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna, brought knowledge of Hinduism to America when he came to the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, remaining to found Vedanta Societies in America and Europe before returning to India to lead the Ramakrishna Order with which the Vedanta Societies are associated. Vedanta temples in the West have been influential in bringing Hindu teachings to many Westerners over the last century, along with instruction in the practices of yoga and meditation.

In the course of the twentieth century, many other Hindu swamis and gurus have made the journey to the West, gathering groups of adherents to follow certain aspects of Hindu teaching and practice. An early yoga master in the West was Yogananda (1893–1952), who came to America in 1920 and stayed for the next thirty years, founding the **Self-Realization Fellowship** with many centers in America and throughout the world. Teaching the basic philosophy of the Yoga Sutras, Yogananda used many modern devices to help Westerners understand and practice yoga—a way of attaining high spiritual energy and evolution by withdrawing life-energy from outer concerns for the opening of one's inner spiritual centers. Teaching that the vision and practice of yoga underlie all the great religions—meaning that Jesus as well as other religious leaders were yoga masters—the Self-Realization Fellowship provides a practical Hindu path accessible to many Western seekers.

Another Hindu master who created a large following in America and throughout the world was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who studied the nondualistic form of meditation taught by the great philosopher Shankara. Coming to America in 1959, he began to teach the popular, simple meditation technique he called **Transcendental Meditation** (TM), attracting much publicity with his charismatic guru presence. Followers in the 1960s and 1970s included many well-known public figures and entertainers (including, for a while, the Beatles), and the movement established Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa. The heart of TM is to follow the natural tendency of the mind to seek the field of greater happiness, employing meditation to stop external distraction and allow the mind to reach the ultimate ground of reality (in Hindu thought, the Brahman). Practitioners spend a short time each day in meditation, repeating a mantra given to them by their spiritual teacher. Many TM teachers hold that this practice is not really a religion but a scientific technique that can be used by anyone to calm mental and physical anxiety and tap into pure consciousness, leading to greater creativity, mental power, healing, and happiness. Although long-term adherents of Tran-



Followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness prepare for an initiation in their temple in Brooklyn.

scendental Meditation are perhaps not as numerous as they once were, the influence of this movement has been substantial, considering that hundreds of thousands of Americans and Europeans have studied and practiced TM at least for a short period in their lives.

Many other Hindu yogis and gurus have started movements in America, but one of the best-known groups is the **International Society for Krishna Consciousness** (ISKCON). This is a movement that advocates a rather strict form of Hindu bhakti, drawing on the Krishna theistic movement championed by the Hindu saint Chaitanya in the sixteenth century.

Teaching that the Krishna sacred stories are literally true and that Krishna is the supreme personal Lord, ISKCON encourages adherents to devote themselves totally to Krishna through chanting the names of Krishna, dancing, and acts of service. Through love for Krishna the soul overcomes its ignorant entrapment in material bodies and moves on the path toward supernal bliss. Disciples live in monastic temples and follow a stringent lifestyle of worship and service with total obedience to their spiritual master; other supporters follow normal careers and join in temple celebrations. Although divisions and scandals have troubled ISKCON in recent years, temples in America and throughout the world continue to thrive as Hindu bhakti centers. In recent years this Hindu sectarian movement has also been growing in its homeland, India.

Buddhist Paths in the Western World While many Westerners have been drawn to the various Hindu groups, equally attractive have been the numerous schools of Buddhism that have made their way to the West and are thriving both in Asian ethnic communities and among groups of Westerners. Among ethnic Buddhist communities in America, largest perhaps is Pure Land Buddhism, consisting of tens of thousands of Japanese Buddhists, most belonging to the Buddhist Churches of America and similar organizations. Similarly, Buddhists from Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and other Asian lands continue their Buddhist practices in America and Europe.

For many years Buddhism has had a strong intellectual attraction for Western scholars, who have translated important Buddhist texts into European languages. But the more widespread interest in Buddhist thought and meditation began with the development of the spiritual counterculture in the 1950s and 1960s, when fascination focused especially on Zen Buddhism, popularized by people like D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. Some went to Japan to practice Zen meditation, and some Zen masters from Japan started meditation centers in the United States. Zen has continued as a major form of Buddhist practice in the West up to the present, with numerous meditation centers in America, Europe, and elsewhere, comprising both the Soto and the Rinzai traditions. Western disciples have become recognized as priests and masters (roshi) and have taken over leadership roles. Zen practitioners are generally small in numbers in the West, for Zen's austere discipline and antisymbolism do not appeal to the masses. Emptying the mind in meditation, sitting quietly in long and strenuous sesshin retreats—this is for the dedicated and strong-minded followers of the Dharma.

While Zen Buddhism seems low-key and austere to many Westerners, Vajrayana Buddhism from Tibet has colorful rituals, mesmerizing chanting, fascinating symbolism, and profound teachings. Although tens of thousands of

Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama and many other lamas, fled Tibet in 1959 when China occupied their country, they perpetuated Tibetan Buddhism in exile, in Nepal and India and even in the West. Some young lamas, notably Chogyam Trungpa and Tarthang Tulku, eventually made their way to America and taught Tibetan Buddhism in a way that could be adopted and practiced in Western society. Various centers were established, most notably the Naropa Institute in Colorado and the Nyingma Meditation Center in Berkeley, California. Vajrayana, as Tantric Buddhism, makes use of the full range of mind and body capabilities, using intense meditation, visualization techniques, rituals, chanting, philosophical study, and more. Although these forms are practiced in somewhat simplified forms in the Western nonmonastic setting, the Western disciples of Tibetan Buddhism are sincere and energetic in pursuing this profound spiritual path.

One more example of Buddhist paths in the Western world is Nichiren Shoshu of America. In Japan, this very large lay Buddhist movement is called Soka Gakkai and claims to number some seventeen million members. It emphasizes the chanting of the Daimoku, "Namu myoho renge kyo" (Praise to the wondrous truth of the *Lotus Sutra*), in front of a mandala designed by Nichiren. Such chanting links one together with the universal Buddha power of the *Lotus Sutra* and brings great spiritual and material benefits. In the post–World War II era, Nichiren Shoshu came to the United States with American servicemen, their Japanese spouses, and other Japanese immigrants; some Japanese Americans joined, and some Westerners found this form of Buddhism to their spiritual liking. Nichiren Shoshu of America is well organized, with group meetings and cultural festivals in addition to the daily household worship of chanting and reciting parts of the *Lotus Sutra*.

NONTRADITIONAL NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The religious paths stemming from the East are not new religions, even though they are fairly newly present in the Western world and represent alternative paths for Westerners. Although many of these Hindu and Buddhist movements have developed forms that are adapted to Western needs and characteristics, they still fit broadly into the family characteristics of Hinduism and Buddhism.

But there are also new religious movements in many parts of the world—movements that do not fit comfortably within any of the traditional paths. Of course, nothing in human culture comes as a totally new entity, and these new religions often use elements from the established sacred paths. But with new sacred experiences, revelations, and teachings, the founders of these movements have created distinctively new paths for their followers.

Some of these new movements have sprung from Western soil, with strong ties to Christian, Jewish, or Muslim tradition, but also reaching back to European roots in antiquity in some cases. Much influence has also come from Eastern religions, as well as from modern secular sources, scientific approaches, humanistic impulses, and modern psychological and therapeutic developments.

To study in depth these newer religious movements would go far beyond this book's purpose and focus. However, to fill out our sense of the vitality of today's religious scene, and to encourage further investigation of some of these interesting and creative movements, it will be helpful to look briefly at several major representatives of these new religious movements, especially as they have appeared in Western contexts.

New Sacred Paths: Nineteenth-Century Roots

Some new religious and spiritual movements have actually been around for many years. The nineteenth century saw the rise of **Baha'i** and **Theosophy**, as well as numerous Christian-based movements such as **Spiritualism**, **Mormonism**, and many others. Many of these movements have continued and are thriving today as established groups in America and in other parts of the world.

Mormonism: the Latter-Day Saints In 1823, a young man named Joseph Smith (1805–1844) felt himself led by an angel to the hill Cumorah near Manchester, New York. There he found some golden plates, which he translated with divine help, thus producing the Book of Mormon, which the Latter-Day Saints see as the revealed Word of God. It is this revelatory experience of a new Word of God, to supplement the Christian Bible, that makes Mormonism into a new religious movement, not just a sectarian offshoot of Christianity.

The newly revealed sacred story tells how some lost tribes of Israel wandered to America, where Christ appeared to them and gave them the word of God containing the same true gospel revealed in the Bible. So the Book of Mormon is a compilation of writings from these prophets living in the ancient Americas. Mormons believe that these new scriptures are in complete harmony with the Bible and that they enhance the understanding of Jesus Christ and the original church established by Jesus Christ.

The promise was made that a New Jerusalem would appear in America. So in 1830, Joseph Smith organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, attracted several thousand converts, and moved westward, first to Ohio, then to Missouri, and then to Illinois, as local people criticized and rejected this new movement. Joseph Smith and his brother were shot by an angry mob in 1844, but then many Mormons followed the new leader, Brigham Young (1801–1877), to their new and lasting center in the Salt Lake valley in Utah. Other, more conservative Mormons, resisting new ideas such as plural marriage, remained behind and established the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (now called Community of Christ), headquartered in Independence, Missouri.

A strong and visionary leader, Brigham Young was also appointed governor of the Utah Territory. Under his leadership the Mormons attempted to create the ideal community on earth in preparation for the Kingdom of God. Although the practice of plural marriage had been revealed to Joseph Smith as part of the new community's life, in 1890 the Mormons abandoned that practice, compromising with the values of American society. Through hard work, solid higher education (centered in Brigham Young University), and participation in American political and economic life, the Mormons have become an established, accepted movement within American life.

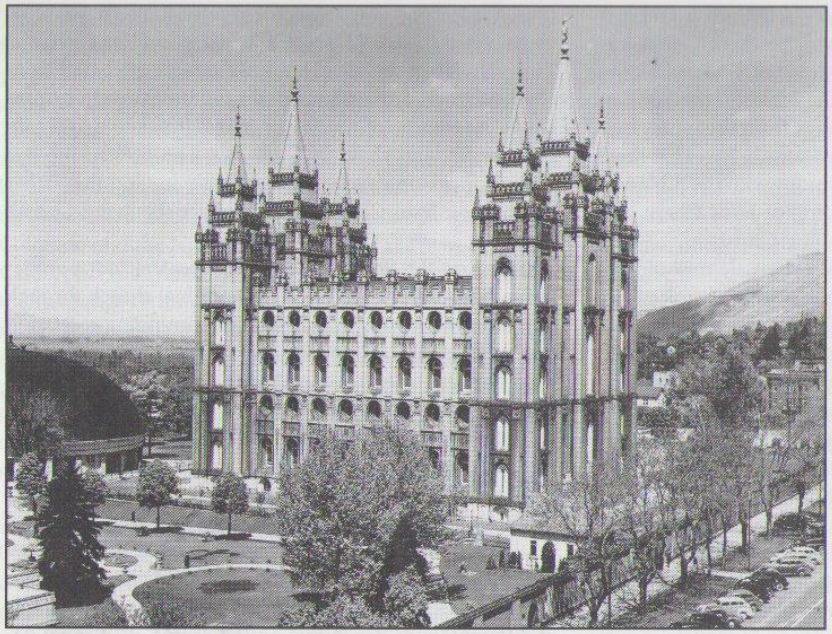
In their teachings about the sacred reality and about human life, the Mormons share many Christian-sounding ideas. But the Book of Mormon supplements the Christian scriptures with a more complete view, according to Mormon belief. With respect to God, Mormons worship only God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. They also envision that faithful Mormons progressing spiritually through the eternities will become gods in that they will share in God's glory and privileges. They consider the world to be a good creation, so that the Kingdom of God can be established here. God created this world out of existing matter and, thus, there can be full agreement with modern scientific views about the world, such as its age in millions of years. Through Adam and Eve, humans became alienated from God and, thus, cannot share in the full measure of life from God. The coming of the Savior makes it possible to regain immortality and share in God's life. The present life is a time to focus on developing faith only in God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and to practice the living Christ's gospel.

Based on the Book of Mormon, a central Mormon belief is in the restoration of Christ's original church through a modern-day prophet, as well as in continuing revelation through a series of modern-day prophets. Mormons believe that the priesthood authority, first given to the Jews and then given by Jesus Christ to his disciples, was lost shortly after Christ's death. That priesthood authority was restored through a modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith. Now there is a succession of prophets who have held the priesthood authority necessary to receive revelation for guiding the restored church, from Joseph Smith to the current prophet, the president of the Mormon church.

Mormons, of course, believe in life after death, available at different levels depending on the degree of spiritual development. A distinctive Mormon teaching is that this path is also open to the ancestors of each Mormon. One can search the family tree, finding ancestors and having them baptized in a sacred temple ritual. Mormons explain this as offering a blessing, a choice, to the ancestor, whose consciousness as an individual continues in the next life.

Usually, gatherings of Mormon congregations take place in meetinghouses, where they hold simple worship services and other social events. The more important rituals and ordinances take place at temples in the major population centers. These include being sealed in marriage for eternity, baptizing the ancestors, and receiving endowments (teachings about the nature of God and of humans). Only those Mormons who follow the strict rules of conduct can take part in the sacred temple rituals. Mormons are encouraged to visit Mormon temples, and so in recent years Mormons have built scores of new temples, as in Boston, New York, and Copenhagen.

Leadership among the Mormons takes different forms. Women have a variety of leadership roles, such as leading organizations, teaching Sunday school, and speaking at the weekly worship services. Only men can hold the priesthood (and, thus, be president of the Mormon church), and men



The Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City with its sharply pointed spires and rows of steep arches.

alone can administer the church ordinances such as baptism. Young men devote two years to missionary activity, often in other parts of the world. Such missionary service is open also to young women as well as retired couples.

The Mormon vision of the good life includes support for higher education, music and the arts, and the various professions. Mormons are expected to work hard and productively, supporting themselves and the church. They have a keen sense of responsibility for one another and for all humans. Here is a new religious movement that is no longer countercultural, as Mormons have retained their special identity while taking an active and responsible role within the modern world.

The Baha'i Sacred Path The Baha'i path arose in nineteenth-century Persia, in the context of the Twelver Shi'ite movement within Islam. As discussed earlier (Chapter 12), the twelfth Imam (successor to Muhammad, in the Shi'ite view) disappeared into the state of occultation, continuing to provide spiritual guidance from a higher sphere, in contact with certain holy leaders and scholars. In 1844, a young man named 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi came forward claiming to be the Bab, the "gateway" to the Imam. Many excited followers gathered around him, but there was much resistance from the established leaders, and the Bab was executed in 1850. A follower, Mirza Hussain 'Ali (1817–1892), took the name Baha'u'llah ("Glory of Allah") and in 1863 revealed that he was the Manifestation of God for the present era, whose coming had been predicted by the Bab.

Baha'u'llah spent much time in exile and in house arrest, but in the midst of it all he wrote letters, taught his followers, and composed sacred texts—especially the *Book of Certitude* (*Kitab-i-Uqan*) and the *Most Holy Book* (*Kitab-i-Aqdas*), in which he established the teachings and way of life in this new era for his followers, the Baha'is. His son Abdul Baha (1844–1921) succeeded him and put forth the basic interpretations of these sacred writings. Abdul Baha traveled and lectured in Europe and America, spreading the Baha'i faith and establishing numerous Assemblies. After his death, his grandson Shoghi Effendi (1896–1957) continued as leader for the developing Baha'i community. Shoghi Effendi established the International House of Justice, sitting in Haifa, Israel, to function after his death as the supreme body governing Baha'i affairs worldwide.

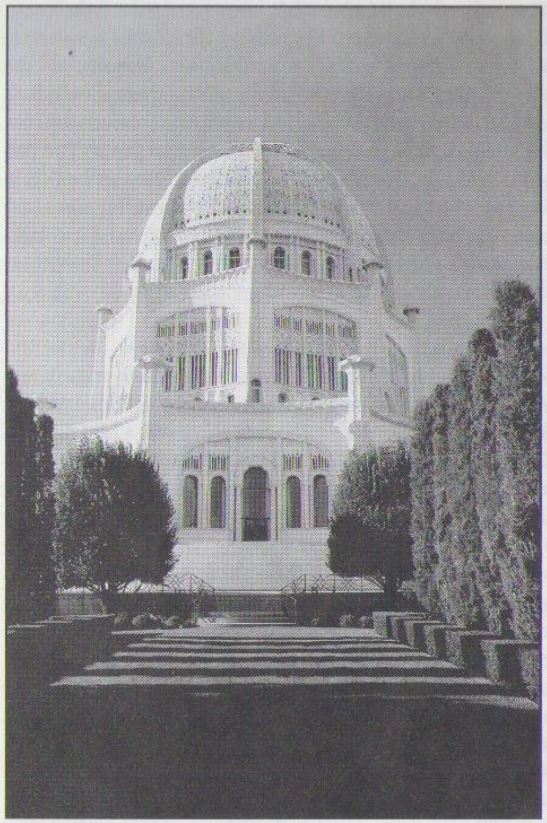
Reflecting the influence of Islam, the whole emphasis in Baha'u'llah's teaching is on *unity*—the unity of God and the unity of humanity. There is one God, who is unknowable in divine essence but who has communicated the divine truth to the world through messengers that have arisen in every era. All the great prophets and founders of the major religions have been manifestations and messengers of God—the Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses,

Jesus, Muhammad, and now Baha'u'llah, the Manifestation of God for the New Era.

While earlier Manifestations of God presented God's truth for their eras, Baha'u'llah's central message for this New Era is the universal truth of the oneness of humanity. And this means the total unity of all races, nations, and classes; it means the total equality of men and women in all aspects of life. Humans are the highest order of creation, with the freedom to realize either their higher or their lower natures. Because of ignorance, errors have entered into the religions and humans have often given in to selfishness and greed, hindering the development of a wholesome humanity in a peaceful world. The truth brought through Baha'u'llah, and interpreted through Abdul Baha and Shoghi Effendi, is the truth for the whole of humankind—the truth that corrects mistakes, overcomes ignorance, and leads the way to reconciliation. This means the essential harmony of all religions, for all religions have taught this truth of unity. It also means harmony between religious truth and scientific inquiry, for all truth is in harmony, whether religious or scientific.

Because of the total unity of God, there can be no separate evil force operative in the universe; what appears to be evil is the absence of good. Religious concepts of the day of judgment and of heaven and hell are not to be taken literally but rather symbolically, in the Baha'i view. Humankind determines the future by actions in the present. The soul is eternal and continues to evolve into different states and conditions after death; when the soul is near to God and God's purposes, that is the condition of heaven, whereas being distant from God is the condition of hell.

Baha'i worship is simple and is focused on prayer and meditation. Each Baha'i is to pray daily, although prayers do not have to take mandated forms, and even daily work is considered to be prayer. Communal worship is carried on in members' homes, consisting of prayer and readings from the writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha and from the scriptures of the other world religions. Members gather not on Sundays but for the monthly feast—based on their annual calendar, which has nineteen months, each consisting of nineteen days. Baha'is are supposed to fast during the nineteen-day month that falls in early March, taking no food or drink from dawn to dusk. There are nine festivals during the course of the year, based mostly on events in the Baha'i sacred story.



The Baha'i House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois.

Most Baha'i activities take place within the local community. When there are sufficient members, the local group elects the local Spiritual Assembly, a nine-member body, to administer the affairs of the local community. Furthermore, each country has a nine-member National Spiritual Assembly elected annually. And the National Assemblies elect the nine-member International House of Justice, whose members serve five-year terms. There are no special clergy, and men and women participate equally in leading worship and in the work of the spiritual assemblies.

The Baha'i vision of life is positive and world-embracing. Work is considered service to God, and justice for all is

regarded as the ruling principle in society. In the Baha'i view there should be universal education for all and a universal language for worldwide communication. War should be eliminated and armaments destroyed, and there should be a world tribunal for solving disputes between nations and for the establishment of a permanent, universal peace. The Baha'i religion itself, with its International House of Justice, is the blueprint for the new world order of universal peace and harmony. This vision has led Baha'is to spread their faith throughout the world, with some five million followers on all continents.

Spiritualism and the Spiritualist Churches Before the rise of the modern scientific view of the universe, it was widely accepted in Europe and elsewhere that the earth was the center of the universe and that there was a hierarchy of intelligences between heaven and earth, with spiritual forces linking the different elements in the world, within and without. Based on this prescientific worldview, various practices such as shamanism, astrology, alchemy, evocation of spirits, and witchcraft flourished. The new scientific, rationalistic view of the universe and of humanity's place in it shattered all that for most of the Western world. But fascination with the possibility of communication with higher intelligences and spirits, and interest in things metaphysical and the occult, never died out completely. Two movements arising in the nineteenth century that embraced the old, alternative view of reality were Spiritualism and Theosophy—very different, yet linked in their fascination with communication with higher realities, with spirits, with masters.

Spiritualism in its modern American form started in 1848 in the home of the Fox family in upstate New York. The two daughters of the family, Margaretta and Kate (eleven and eight years old), puzzled by rappings that had been going on in their house, worked out a code for communicating with the spirit doing the rapping. The story spread like wildfire, large discussions were held, and enthusiasm for spirit manifestations erupted throughout America, Europe, and elsewhere. All over there were rappings sounding out occult messages, tables rising and turning, voices heard from the spirit world, and more. Church attendance dwindled and Spiritualist meetings were packed as people sought communication with the spirits of their loved ones or with great and wise spirits on the other side. Prominent American figures, including Abraham Lincoln, supported the movement. Several utopian communities were founded based on guidance from higher spirits. Some Spiritualist teachers developed an evolutionary view of the soul as traveling gradually higher within the spiritual planes that surround the earth.

After the great enthusiasm of the 1850s, support slackened for Spiritualism, as certain frauds were exposed and as churches and academics ridiculed the movement. The Civil War brought an end to the great popularity Spiritualism had enjoyed, but devoted followers carried on the practice, with revivals in the twentieth century, both in America and in Europe. There are numerous Spiritualist churches and denominations today, although membership and affiliation tend to shift rather easily.

Spiritualist churches center on the spiritualistic powers of the minister, often a wise, experienced woman; she or he is the medium who knows how to contact the spirits and guide the followers in this venture. Rituals and doctrine generally are broadly taken from Christianity and from other religions. In a Spiritualist service, the groups may sing hymns and practice healing by prayer and laying on of hands, but the center point is receiving the spirit messages. The minister-medium goes into a trance, and one of the "control" spirits speaks through her or him, giving a general message and individual messages for the different members of the group. Sometimes a seance is held in a small group, with a guiding spirit speaking through the medium bringing messages from spirit relatives and friends.

Many of the new religious movements have been influenced by Spiritualism. Here is religious experience documenting the possibility of overcoming the human limitations of space, time, body, and even death. We can expand our minds and our spirits toward higher planes and communicate with the spirits and powers on the other side.

Theosophy Communication with the Masters, those who know and control the hidden side of reality, the occult—that is a major theme of another movement that arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century: the Theosophical (Divine Wisdom) Society. The guiding light of Theosophy was the remarkable Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), a woman of great charisma and mystery, reputed to have extraordinary psychic powers. Born into a Russian noble family, she tells of some twenty years of fantastic travel all over the world,

meeting with masters of the occult in Egypt, Mexico, Canada, and finally even in Tibet, undergoing initiation into the secret doctrine that all the world religions are based on. Coming to America in 1874, she teamed up with Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), a scientist and lawyer who was investigating Spiritualism, and together they founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. They met regularly, often at Madame Blavatsky's New York apartment, to engage in spirited discussion about expanding human mental and spiritual powers through connection with ancient esoteric truths and supernatural phenomena. The discussions were dominated by Blavatsky's own firsthand experiences, and in 1878 she published *Isis Revealed*, transmitting the occult science and wisdom of the ancient Masters for the modern world.

But increasingly their spiritual journey pointed toward the wisdom of the East, and in 1878 Blavatsky and Olcott set sail for India, establishing the Theosophy headquarters in Madras and more purposefully linking their vision with the truths of Hinduism and Buddhism. They showed great respect for Eastern societies, which were very much under British domination at this time. They were active in social reforms in Sri Lanka, helping Buddhists win benefits under British rule. They interacted with a variety of Hindu spiritual leaders, adopting basic Hindu concepts such as karma and reincarnation in their teachings, and Theosophy came to be respected and supported by numerous Hindu intellectuals. In turn, Theosophical leaders helped Indian people recover confidence in their own spiritual heritage after being subject to colonialism for so many years. For example, Annie Besant (1847–1933), leader of the Theosophical Society in the first part of the twentieth century, worked for social reform, education, and women's suffrage in India and assisted in the movement toward home rule by Indian people.

The most important text for Theosophical ideas, *The Secret Doctrine*, was written by Madame Blavatsky in 1888; she claimed it was based on a lost text, *Stanzas of Dzyan*. A vision emerges here of all of reality emanating from the One, as in Hindu thought, evolving into spirit, mind, and matter, and then withdrawing again back into the One in great pulsing cycles. All of reality is linked together in vast chains of spiritual consciousness, with even the planets and the solar systems controlled by great minds. Humans, each at a different level of spiritual development, have the potential to evolve to the higher levels of spirit. The role of the Masters is to prepare others for expanding consciousness and to initiate them in higher planes of consciousness at the level of Masters, planets, and solar systems. Eventually, Theosophical leaders developed a full-blown hierarchy of spiritual Masters, including the Solar Logos ruling the solar level, with Sanat Kumara residing in Shamballa as Lord of the World, under whom are the Buddha, the Bodhisattva, and Manu. On the next plane, emanating from above, are the Seven Rays governing all areas of earthly life, each Ray ruled by Masters who have appeared numerous times as guides in human history, in personages such as Krishna, Jesus, Ramanuja, Roger Bacon, and many, many more.

Theosophy remained essentially an intellectual movement, without developing ritual worship and other social and practical religious forms. Its appeal was mainly to well-educated middle- and upper-class people in America and England. Although plagued by schisms and struggles for leadership, the Society was quite popular in the first part of the twentieth century and introduced many Westerners to the fascinating realm of Hindu and Buddhist teachings.

Today there are several small organizations that carry on the Theosophy tradition, the largest and most active being the Theosophical Society in America. But Theosophy has had an impact far beyond its current membership. The writings of Madame Blavatsky and others have introduced a great many people to the fascinations of the occult, and a whole variety of new spiritual movements have spun off from Theosophy. These include, for example, the Full Moon Meditation Groups founded by Alice Bailey; the Liberal Catholic Church, a Theosophical group employing a liturgy similar to the Catholic mass; Anthroposophy, founded by Rudolph Steiner, with a larger emphasis on educational activities and scientific study of the spiritual world; the followers of Krishnamurti, who was identified by Annie Besant as the next vehicle of the World Teacher but who left Theosophy to teach his own philosophy of life; the Rosicrucian Fellowship, led by Max Grashoff; the "I AM" movement founded by Guy Ballard, a Theosophical group teaching that humanity began in America and important Masters appeared in the American West; and more. Beyond these various groups, Theosophy, much like Spiritualism, has been a significant influence in the recent upsurge of interest in things occult and in nature spirituality, in the broad religious subculture sometimes referred to as the New Age Movement.

New Spiritual Movements of the Twentieth Century

Just as in the nineteenth century, so also in the twentieth century, numerous new religious movements have been spawned, some fleeting and diffuse in character, some rather long-lasting and tightly organized. Of the hundreds of such new groups and movements, we can get a sense of the contemporary scene by focusing briefly on several representative movements from different parts of that landscape. We will look at two examples of well-defined and structured groups, namely, Scientology and the Unification Church. And we will survey another broad and diffuse new movement, the nature spirituality movement encompassing Neo-Paganism and Wicca.

Scientology Whereas many new religious movements draw on ancient occult and spiritualist traditions, and others receive much inspiration from Eastern sources, a few modern groups have their sources solidly within the modern, Western worldview with its scientific mind-set and technological procedures. The spiritual context is still there—the founder has supernormal spiritual knowledge and power and is able to lead initiates into higher levels of personal transformation. But the setting is modern Western society, the language is technological and business oriented, and the goal is personal freedom, power, and happiness within this life. One well-known example of this kind of movement is **Scientology**.

The founder of Scientology was L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), a science fiction writer who, receiving a spiritual message through a near-death experience in the Navy, turned to teaching and sharing his new vision and technique for transforming the human condition. He attracted a great deal of interest when he published these ideas in 1950 in his famous book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, considered the foundation for Scientology. Four years later Hubbard established the Founding Church of Scientology, and later he moved to England and began the Hubbard College of Scientology in Sussex. Although he stayed out of public view for most of his last years, his picture hangs in all Scientology buildings and his followers continue to venerate him as the chief teacher and master of the new technology.

At a simple level, Scientology considers all human ills to have arisen from experiences of shock in present or past lives (often in the womb) that cause "engrams" or sensory impressions to be recorded in the mind, which then produce psychosomatic or mental disorders and a life of unhappiness. The Scientology technique called "auditing" is designed to enable one to dislodge those engrams and become "clear." In this process, a trained Scientology auditor uses an "E-meter," an electrical device that measures areas of reaction or tension as the "preclear" person responds to questions about the areas of emotional stress. In this way, the engrams are gradually dislodged and the person goes "clear," an experience that is often described as ecstatic, joyful freedom.

Hubbard linked this rather simple therapeutic process with a deeper mythology and spiritual transformation, giving Scientology an aura of the supernatural. He taught about thetans who, millions of years ago, played games and created MEST (matter, energy, space, and time), entrapping themselves in the material universe and forgetting their true nature as eternal and omnipotent thetans. The new revelation Scientology offers is that we are all thetans, having gone through seemingly endless reincarnations, acquiring engrams in all these lives. And so the next stage after becoming clear is to become an "operating thetan" (OT), an initiatory process under the guidance of a teacher who has already reached that stage. The OT is freed from the limitations and toils of MEST. As one moves to the higher levels of OT, there are ecstatic experiences of freedom from body, time, and space.

Scientology is a highly structured, efficient organization that supplies much for its followers in terms of spiritual meaning, social involvement, a close family atmosphere, and a sense of personal growth and transformation. There is considerable cost for the "tech" procedures, but those who pass through these initiatory processes find many rewards.

The Unification Church A well-known new religious movement that arose from Christian roots and still claims to be a Christian denomination is the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, better known as the **Unification Church**. This new movement is unlike many of the other new religious movements in that it has been strongly anticommunist and pro-America, it advocates sexual purity and family values, and it generally supports conservative political and social causes. Yet it has become one of the more controversial of the new religious movements.

The founder, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, was born in Korea in 1920, and his family joined a missionary Pres-

byterian church while he was a child. On Easter Sunday in 1936, when he was sixteen, he had a transforming revelatory experience: Jesus appeared to him, telling him to complete the saving mission that had been interrupted. Over the next years Moon struggled against Satanic forces and communicated with Abraham, Moses, the Buddha, and God. He came to understand that humankind's relationship with God had been disrupted with a secret crime committed by Adam and Eve, and he felt himself called to restore this relationship and establish the kingdom of God on earth. He began his mission in North Korea in 1945, and his imprisonment and torture by Communist authorities is interpreted as his own "payment" for the sins of the first parents. Finally, in South Korea in 1958, he established the religion of the Divine Principle, as he called his teaching, and he attracted considerable numbers of followers.

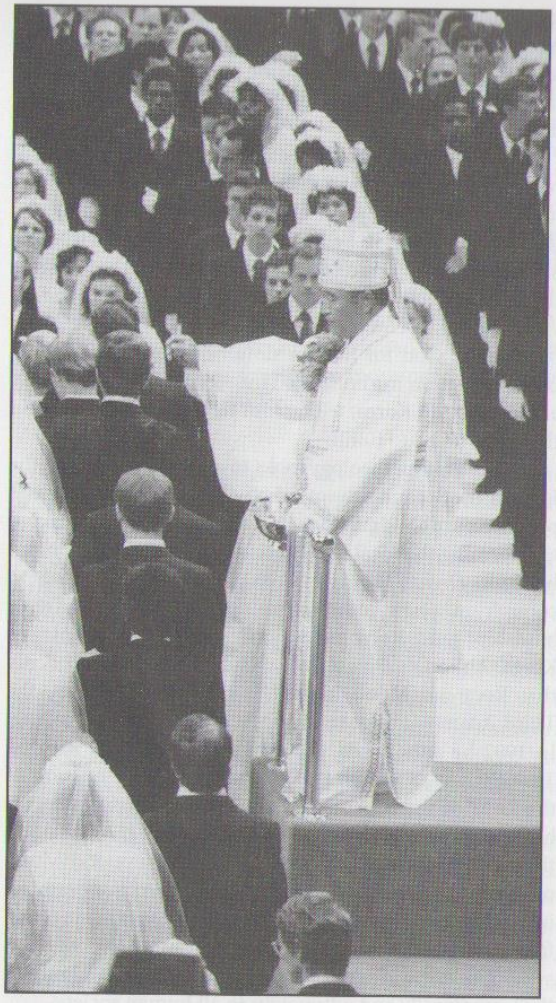
A Unification Church missionary, Miss Young Oon Kim, brought this new religion to America as early as 1959, translating Reverend Moon's book, *Divine Principle*, into English. But the movement did not gain much ground in America until Reverend Moon moved to the United States in 1971 and began to spread his teaching energetically through lecture tours, large public rallies, and meetings with public officials and dignitaries. The Unification Church proved adept at raising funds, with converts even canvassing for funds among the general public. Through wise business investments and income-producing enterprises, the Unification Church has generated a flow of income that allows it to carry on its affairs and conduct many activities, such as publishing a daily newspaper, *The Washington Times*, and sponsoring conferences for scholars in the area of religious studies.

Although the Unification Church wishes to be considered a Christian church, and although Reverend Moon puts forth *Divine Principle* as the true interpretation of the Christian Bible, the vision of God, humankind, and salvation set forth in Unification theology is quite distinct from traditional Christian views. Reverend Moon holds that God's basic purpose is to have all humankind live together with God as one divine family, within divine laws of Polarity and the Four Position Foundation. And so God (both male and female) created humans—Adam and Eve—to be the ideal father and mother and to have a child. Thus, the whole human race would be built on the four-unit foundation of God, father, mother, child. But here the secret crime enters in: Satan in serpent form seduced Eve into having spiritual intercourse with him, and Eve in turn seduced Adam into nonmarital physical intercourse. Thus, Satan took the place of God in relation to the first parents, and the proper fourfold foundation was disrupted for all their descendants.

The Bible shows how God attempted numerous times to restore the proper relationship, but unsuccessfully. Even Jesus' mission as the Christ was only partly successful, for God intended him to be the Second Adam and to marry a Second Eve to produce godly offspring and, thus, restore the human family under God. But, unable to fulfill the divine plan, Jesus could only submit to crucifixion, making payment to God for human sinfulness but only effecting partial salvation for humans. Thus, Jesus appeared to Reverend Moon in Korea, telling him to complete the mission that Jesus failed to fulfill.

So Unification theology looks toward a Third Adam, the Lord of the Second Advent, who will marry a New Eve and produce pure children, thus bringing purity to humankind and forming the ideal family on which God's kingdom can be built. *Divine Principle* looks for the new Messiah to come from a new country, one that has suffered extreme hardship—and Reverend Moon believes that country is Korea. Although *Divine Principle* does not state explicitly that Reverend Moon himself is that new Messiah—the Third Adam—it appears that he has accepted this calling. In 1992 he announced in Korea that he and his wife are True Parents of all humankind, taking on the mission of the Lord of the Second Advent. The Unification Church has placed strong emphasis on the work of reconciliation through the formation of ideal families. Reverend Moon presides over mass marriages for his followers; for example, in 1992 he and his wife held a Blessing Ceremony in Seoul for thirty thousand couples from around the world—symbolically transferring the purity of his own family to the larger family and, ultimately, to all human society.

The Unification Church teaches a strong ethical and moral code, together with a life dedicated to sacrificial good deeds, participating in the general payment for the sins of past humanity. Objections to the Unification Church from Christian churches and anticult groups have largely centered on accusations of brainwashing young people and disrupting families; and Unification leaders are accused of living lavishly through the labors of deluded followers. Furthermore, Reverend Moon was convicted on charges of income tax evasion and imprisoned in 1984,



A large Unification Church public ritual at Madison Square Garden in New York (1982), as the Rev. Sun Myung Moon conducts a mass wedding ceremony for couples whose marriages he arranged.

dealing a blow to the status of the Unification Church in the eyes of others. However, some of the objectionable practices have been stopped, and it must be remembered that anticult sentiment in America does not always have an objective basis. Although Christian groups such as the National Council of Churches have generally not recognized the Unification Church as a Christian denomination, there is considerable support for the right of the Unification Church to practice its faith as it sees fit.

Nature Spirituality: Neo-Paganism and Wicca For an increasing number of people today, the sense of being connected with the sacred and experiencing spiritual transformation is to be found within those ancient paths that were suppressed and replaced by the great world religions—that is, within the nature-oriented religions through which humans were connected with the sacred life flowing and pulsating within Mother Earth. The world religions, particularly the monotheistic ones, dominated by patriarchal structures and ideas of one God totally separate from nature, downgraded the sacred value of earth-centered life. To recover that sense of sacred belonging and connectedness with nature is the focus of many new movements. The influence of nature spirituality, with its concerns about ecology and holistic human life within our earth-habitation, is being felt across all the religions. Not all people involved in these concerns would think of it as a religious path; but a dedicated and growing group of people today identify themselves specifically with those ancient paths that centered in nature spirituality, and they follow that as their own sacred path. They go by names from the past, such as Pagans, Druids, Witches, and Goddess-Worshipers.

In seeking a common term for this variety of groups, it has become fairly common for many to identify themselves as **Neo-Pagans**. *Pagan*, originally meaning a "country-dweller" in Roman times, eventually became a derogatory term to refer to those who practiced polytheistic nature religions rather than converting to Christianity. But most Neo-Pagans today eagerly reach back to those pre-Christian polytheistic or pantheistic religions of Egypt, Greece, Rome, and old Europe for the sources of their spirituality. Though some resonate to Eastern ideas such as reincarnation, generally Neo-Pagans have little interest in structured and authoritative Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Nor do they identify with other tightly organized new religions such as Scientology, Baha'i, and the rest. Their inspiration is the "Old Religion" with its goddesses, gods, and rituals, and their focus is on the free and ecstatic experience of transformation within the sacredness of nature—without systems of belief and dogma, without hierarchical rule, without ascetic self-denial.

Instead of the monotheistic idea of one God separate from nature, Neo-Pagans experience a different orientation. All of nature is animate with sacred power—rocks and rivers and dreams alike, with no separation into sacred and profane. Sacred reality is immanent in nature, whether in the sky and the moon, or in the trees and the canyons, or in humans and animals alike. Yet this is no monistic, one-dimensional sacred reality, for Neo-Pagans are polytheists as they experience the multiplicity and diversity of the sacred in an endless array as boundless as nature itself. Many Neo-Pagans honor ancient pantheons, such as those worshiped by Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Celts. Often special emphasis is placed on the great Goddess, widely worshiped in many forms in old Europe, Egypt, and many cultures of the world. Inspiration is drawn not only from the ancient traditions but also from Native Americans, other tribal peoples around the world, literary works like *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, and even science fiction.

Humans, like all parts of nature, participate in divinity; they are gods and goddesses, reexperiencing that identity time and again through ritual and festival. In the rush of modern life and religion, people have become alienated from sacred nature and, thus, from their inner selves. To reform sacred life through linkage with nature, Neo-Pagans focus most of their attention on ritual and ceremony. Many groups try as best they can to reproduce the sacred rituals of the ancient Druids, the Romans, the Egyptians, and others, although little written record of these rituals remains and most oral tradition has been blotted out. They also look to guides from other nature-oriented paths, such as that of Native Americans with their vision quests, sweat lodges, crystals, and medicine wheels. But with a flexible and innovative attitude, they often create their own forms of group ritual oriented to the changing configurations of nature and human life—the four directions, the seasons, the moon and the sun, the human life cycle. A magic circle may be drawn, creating a new sacred world. With rituals of chanting and dancing, goddesses and gods without and within are evoked, and worshipers experience a deeper sense of how their lives are interwoven with the greater patterns of nature.

Neo-Pagan groups, with their distaste for organization and authority, tend to be flexible, changing movements. One group that was popular in the 1970s was Feraferia ("nature celebration"), founded by Frederick Adams on the basis of an ecstatic experience in which he realized the sacred feminine to be the living, personal unity of all things. The primordial creatrix spins a cosmic dance and all unique realities come into existence, including Mother, Father, Son, and Daughter deities. It is the Maiden Goddess, Kore, who is central, representing beauty, creativity, and desire. Feraferia's celebratory calendar is the life cycle of Kore, including her birth in early spring, her pubescent maidenhood, her nuptials, her retiring beneath the earth in winter. There is much emphasis on play and sensuality in these festivals, for humans need to get in touch with their own sensual nature as part of the rhythmic pulsing of nature.

It appears that many of the Neo-Pagan groups today identify themselves with **Wicca**, a modern renewal of the Old Religion of Witchcraft. The Craft today is a loosely knit movement of people committed to restoring the Wicca traditions of pre-Christian Europe. Although some Witches feel this religion has been passed on from ancient times, the modern interest appears to have begun with Margaret Murray's book, *Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), in which she presented Witchcraft as the surviving pre-Christian religion of Europe. Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) later told how he was initiated into one of the surviving ancient English covens in 1939 and then published accounts of how Witchcraft had survived. Other influential authors have added to the mythic history, worldview, and practice of Wicca, such as Starhawk in her *Spiral Dance* and Margo Adler in *Drawing Down the Moon*.

The mythic story of Wicca sees it as a religion dating back to paleolithic times in the worship of the god of the hunt and the goddess of fertility, universally practiced all over Europe. Christianity converted the nobility of society and took over sacred places and dates of the Old Religion, though dwellers in rural areas kept to their old practices. Eventually Christianity turned the god of the Old Religion into the devil and distorted all records, but small family groups went underground and kept the religion alive throughout the Middle Ages until, finally, the Witchcraft Laws in England were repealed in 1951. Most modern adherents of Witchcraft do not take this story as literal history, seeing it more as metaphoric and spiritual truth. While feeling strong ties to the ancient traditions, they believe creativity in practicing the religion today is just as important as unbroken lineage to the past.

Like other Neo-Pagans, Wiccans hold that all of nature is alive with the sacred and that humans are interconnected with nature, like everything else in the world. Gods and

goddesses are present everywhere, in everyone and everything, as the inner spiritual energy of all of nature. In ritual and ceremony the focus typically is on the Goddess, who appears in triple form, as Maiden, Mother, and Crone, symbolized by the waxing, full, and waning phases of the moon. And there is the Horned God, the male lord of animals, who is born each year at the winter solstice, is the springtime lover of the Goddess, and dies in the fall as the Goddess becomes the Crone for wintertime.

Members of Wicca form their own small groups known as *covens*, typically of twelve or thirteen members, with no hierarchical organization or authoritarian priesthood—all members are Witches. Their main rituals involve the creation of sacred space by "casting the circle," through purification rituals involving the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air, and through demarcation of the four directions. The circle becomes a sacred world, the place where contact with sacred reality without and within takes place. Depending on the tradition of the coven, a variety of sacred implements may be used, such as chalice, wands, and swords. Worshipers chant and dance in circles to raise the energy and then focus that collective energy into a "cone of power" to accomplish some goal of healing and transformation. A powerful ritual in some covens is the "drawing down" of the Goddess (symbolized by the moon) into a priestess of the coven, who thus becomes the Goddess present within the circle.

The usual meetings of the coven are called *esbats*, but they also meet on the great festivals called *sabbats*, which include Halloween (Samhain), the Celtic New Year, the winter purification festival (Oimelc, February 1), the marriage of God and Goddess (Beltane, May 1), and the festival of first fruits (Lughnasadh, August 1), as well as the solstices and the equinoxes. Beyond the covens, a recent development in Wicca is the burgeoning of large outdoor festivals, where Witches and Neo-Pagans meet others from throughout the world and feel at home among their true family. These festivals have contributed to creating a national Wicca community with shared dances, chants, rituals, and stories.

An important and invigorating development in the Wiccan movement has been the growth of feminist spirituality. Women have always played prominent roles in Neo-Pagan groups, in contrast with some of the other new religious movements, but in recent years Wicca has become a vehicle of intensified interest in recovering women's spirituality. The worship of the Goddess provides a natural focus, as the rituals, songs, dances, and stories are devoted to the ceremonial exploration of women's mysteries and the renewed experience of the sacred meaning of women's lives. Covens that are restricted to women are called Dianic covens, often focusing exclusively on the great Goddess in all her multiple forms. Some concern has arisen as to whether such exclusive focus on the Goddess tends toward a new form of monotheism, replacing God the Father with God the Mother. But such a development is unlikely, given the multiplicity of forms in which the Goddess appears and functions—sacralizing earth and nature, the natural human functions, the different phases of women's lives, and much more.

It is difficult to estimate membership in the various Witchcraft groups today, given the low-key organization and the atmosphere of privacy, but clearly there is much vitality in the movement. The highly visible presence of several Neo-Pagan and Wicca groups at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago has stimulated the formation of new groups. The movement has developed to the point at which the need for seminaries to train ordained priests is felt—for example, Wiccans would like to serve as chaplains in the military and in prisons and hospitals, but the seminary credentials for that have been lacking for them. At present, most professional religious training for Witches occurs in Unitarian Universalist seminaries, from which dozens of Wiccan ministers have graduated in recent years.

Whatever the numbers of Wicca members today, it is clear that the movement plays an influential role beyond its numbers. Festivals have proliferated to over a hundred each year, with many people participating who are not necessarily members of covens. Many of those attending, women but also some men, are particularly interested in feminist spirituality and Goddess worship. And numerous nature sanctuaries and temples have been established, contributing to something new in Wicca: a group of lay adherents who participate and support the movement but do not consider themselves Witches—a term they tend to reserve for priestesses and priests in the movement.

And Yet More Movements There is still more. There is the fascinating religious subculture identified in the 1980s as the **New Age Movement**, emerging from the counterculture of the sixties, with gurus like Ram Dass and, more recently, Shirley MacLaine. Emphasizing a planetary consciousness in the Theosophical tradition and reviving

Spiritualist techniques of channeling with spiritual realities, this broad movement has brought with it a new emphasis in the metaphysical-occult tradition: personal transformation and growth. And so it moves together with many other interests, such as the Human Potential Movement, the Holistic Health Movement, Native American shamanistic spirituality, healing through use of crystals, astrology, selected Eastern techniques, and much more. It is generally agreed these days that the "New Age" is not really a unified movement in itself but an umbrella term for many groups and movements and eclectic spiritual seekers—a religious subculture with a vague common direction but constantly changing shapes.

Two other new movements that are not organized but have rather clear identity and purpose should be mentioned here, even though they do not necessarily form new religious movements in themselves: the Feminist Spirituality Movement and Deep Ecology.

The **Feminist Spirituality Movement** has leaders and adherents in most or all the religions. To some, Feminist Spirituality itself may be their religion, particularly those involved in Neo-Pagan Goddess worship. But the influence of this movement is being felt as a transforming force across the lines of the different religions—celebrating the feminine aspects of the divine, retrieving women's voices in the sacred stories, and recovering feminine values and patterns of human relationships.

Deep Ecology is a movement seeking to recover the sacred sense of interconnectedness with all of the natural world, humans included. Going beyond the simple science of ecology, Deep Ecology attempts to articulate a comprehensive religious and philosophical view to replace Western anthropocentrism with a "biocentrism," meaning that every living being has an equal right to be. Some Deep Ecologists look to the *Gaia* hypothesis of scientist James Lovelock—the view that the whole earth, with all life and all the surrounding atmosphere, forms one living and self-regulating being, Gaia. Gaia, thus, is our mother and support, but at the same time, if we do not respect the whole balance of life on this earth, the life process of Gaia will pass on, leaving humanity behind. So Deep Ecologists look to a spiritual transformation as essential to human survival on this planet. Again, there are some for whom Deep Ecology is a religion, but the movement crosses religious lines to evoke responses of ecological spirituality among people of different religions.

A movement that shares this perspective with Deep Ecology is **Ecofeminism**, holding the ecological crisis to result from patriarchal values that have created a master–slave relationship between humans and nature, just like the one that exists between men and women. The ecological concerns expressed in these movements, linking them together with issues of spiritual transformation and religious commitment, will surely be high on the agenda of all religious groups in the future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think are the most important reasons for the rise of new religious movements in recent times? Discuss whether you think these movements will be a long-lasting part of the religious world or will gradually fade from the scene.
2. Discuss the reasons for the apprehension many people feel with regard to new and strange cults. How would you identify potentially dangerous movements (such as the Branch Davidians of Waco) and distinguish them from the other new movements?
3. Discuss the extent to which the Hindu and Buddhist movements growing in the West are still within the mainline traditions from which they stem. Are some groups so Westernized as to become new religious movements?
4. Do you think the Mormons should be considered a Christian church? Why or why not?
5. What is the main theme of the Baha'i teachings, and how does this shape their sense of mission in the world?
6. Compare and contrast Spiritualism and Theosophy, two movements centered on communication with higher realities. What sorts of interests do they seem to share? What are some of their significant differences?
7. Does Scientology appear to you more as a modern therapeutic technique or more as a spiritual path focusing on the supernatural?
8. Discuss the extent to which you think the Unification Church should be considered to be within the worldwide framework of Christianity.
9. Give reasons for the rapid growth of Neo-Paganism and Wicca groups recently, in the face of the negative attitude that is prevalent in our culture toward this kind of practice.

KEY TERMS: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Baha'i new religious movement arising in Persia and spreading throughout the world, founded by Baha'u'llah (1817–1892), regarded by his followers as the Manifestation of God for this new world era

Church of Christ Scientist Christian group founded in America by Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), emphasizing reliance on Divine Mind for spiritual growth and for overcoming sickness

Deep Ecology contemporary movement emphasizing a sacred sense of human interconnectedness with all the natural world

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International Society for Krishna Consciousness new religious movement, founded by Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896–1977), drawing on traditional Hindu practices of worshiping Krishna as the supreme manifestation the divine; known as ISKCON, this movement has drawn many Westerners as devotees

Jehovah's Witnesses Christian movement arising in America, teaching strict literal understanding of biblical ideas and holding firmly to distinctive views such as pacifism, refusal to accept blood transfusions, and others

Mormonism new religious movement founded in America by Joseph Smith (1805–1844) on the basis of the Book of Mormon, known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, with headquarters in Utah; another smaller group, based in Independence, Missouri, is the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

Neo-Pagans broad new religious movement emphasizing nature spirituality on the basis of pre-Christian traditions about gods, goddesses, and sacred nature, including various groups such as Druids, witches, goddess-worshipers, and more

New Age Movement very broad term sometimes used to identify the religious subculture that emphasizes personal transformation and growth through spiritual techniques such as channeling, planetary consciousness, shamanism, astrology, use of crystals, and much more

Scientology new religious movement founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), emphasizing scientific-type techniques to remove mental and physical disorders and bring spiritual transformation

Self-Realization Fellowship modern religious movement founded in America by Yogananda (1893–1952), teaching various Hindu yogic practices

Spiritualism broad religious movement begun in America in the 1840s, focused on methods of communicating with spirits of the dead; some groups are organized as Spiritualist churches

Theosophy new religious movement founded in America by Madame Helena Blavasky (1831–1891) and Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), integrating Hindu and Buddhism ideas with notions of communicating with higher spiritual masters

Transcendental Meditation Hindu meditation movement founded in America by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (b. 1917), emphasizing simple meditation techniques for practical benefits

Unification Church new religious movement founded in Korea by Rev. Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920), based on Christian ideas but teaching a new Messiah to form the ideal human family

Wicca one of the Neo-Pagan new religious movements, emphasizing traditions of witchcraft as nature spirituality, focused on the powers of goddesses and gods of nature

Glossary

Abba Aramaic term for "father" used by Jesus in addressing God

Abbasids classical Muslim dynasty, ruling at Baghdad, eighth to thirteenth centuries C.E.

Abu Bakr companion of the Prophet Muhammad and first caliph (d. 634)

Advent season of the Christian church year before the celebration of Christmas

aesthetic concerning beauty or artistic perception, important for religious expression

agricultural revolution the widespread changes in human culture when ancient humans learned to produce their own food in Neolithic times

Ahriman the Pahlavi form of Angra Mainyu

Ahura Mazda the "wise Lord," eternal, supreme creator of all, as taught by Zarathustra

Akhenaton king in ancient Egypt who attempted to enforce a form of monotheism centered on the sun-god Aton

Akitu new year's festival in ancient Babylon

al-Ghazali great thinker (1058–1111 C.E.) who synthesized orthodox Islamic thought and Sufism

'Ali nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the fourth caliph (d. 661); considered by Shi'ites to be the first imam or successor to Muhammad

Allah "the God"; Quranic designation for the one God

Amesha Spentas in Zoroastrianism, the "Holy Immortals," Good Purpose, Truth, Dominion, Devotion, Perfection, Immortality, and Holy Spirit, generated by Ahura Mazda to aid in the creation of the world

Anahita in Zoroastrianism, one of the Yazata or worshipful ones, the goddess of water and fertility whose cult was widespread in the Roman world

ancient civilizations the great civilizations that developed after the agricultural revolution, with cities, temple cults, kings, commerce, and often systems of writing

Angra Mainyu evil Spirit in Zoroastrian thought, upholder of the lie (druj), cosmic opponent of Ahura Mazda

animism belief in spirits; theory that religion originated in reverence for spirits of living beings and inanimate objects

Apache Native Americans of southwestern North America

Apostles' Creed statement of faith dating from the second century C.E., universally accepted by Christians

Arianism a teaching advocated by the priest Arius and his followers that Christ was created in time as the Son of God; this teaching was rejected by the Council of Nicea

asha Truth, one of the Holy Immortals in Zoroastrianism; also, the spiritual quality of truth

atonement doctrine of how humans are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ's work

Augustine leading theologian (354–430) in the early Christian church; bishop of Hippo in North Africa

Avesta the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrians, including the *Yasna* (the Gathas), the *Yashts*, and other sacred texts

Ba'al storm-fertility god of the ancient Canaanites

Baha'i new religious movement arising in Persia and spreading throughout the world, founded by Baha'u'llah (1817–1892), regarded by his followers as the Manifestation of God for this new world era

baptism ritual of initiation into the Christian church through washing of water, viewed as a sacrament by many

bar mitzvah ceremony in which a thirteen-year-old boy becomes an adult member of the Jewish community

bat mitzvah equivalent of bar mitzvah ceremony for girls in Reform and Conservative Jewish congregations

Bear Festival important festival among bear-hunting people such as the Ainu of Japan

Bible sacred scripture for Christians, consisting of the Old Testament (Christian term for the Hebrew scriptures) and the New Testament

Blessingway important Navajo prayer ceremonials that renew the primordial creative actions within life situations today

brit milah *see* circumcision

busk festival at the green corn ripening among the Creek Native Americans

caliph "deputy," also "successor" to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of Islam

canon a standard; refers to the accepted writings that make up the Bible and to other church standards such as canon law

Cargo Cults Melanesian movements in expectation of the return of the ancestors on great cargo ships, a response to Western influence

catholic "universal," pertaining to the whole Christian Catholic Church; Catholic also designates more specific bodies, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and others

Changing Woman important divine figure who brings renewal among Native Americans of southwestern North America

Christ Greek title meaning "anointed one" from Hebrew "messiah," applied to Jesus of Nazareth by his followers

Christmas *see* Feast of the Nativity

Christology doctrine about the nature and role of Christ

church the community of all Christians; also specific groups, congregations, and buildings used for worship

Church of Christ Scientist Christian group founded in America by Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), emphasizing reliance on Divine Mind for spiritual growth and for overcoming sickness

circumcision boys' initiation ritual that occurs on the eighth day after birth and is called brit milah (covenant of circumcision) in Judaism

clergy ordained church leaders; in the early Christian church, bishops were appointed as overseers, assisted by presbyters (priests) and deacons, and similar clergy roles have continued to the present day, with many variants in the different churches and denominations

confirmation ritual of reaffirming vows taken in baptism; considered a sacrament by some Christians

Conservative Judaism movement attempting to adapt Judaism to modern life by using principles of change within the traditional laws; occupies middle ground between Reform and Orthodox Judaism

Constantine Roman emperor (273–337) who legalized and promoted Christianity

cosmic state perspective in ancient Mesopotamia that the cosmos is governed by great gods of nature

cosmogonic myth sacred story that tells of the creation or founding of the world and of basic human realities

Council of Nicea first great church council, convened in 325 to settle disputes about the nature of Christ

Council of Trent council convened by the pope in 1545 to reform the church and oppose the actions of the Protestants

covenant (berith) relationship between God and Israel, enacted on Mt. Sinai, based on Israel's acceptance of God's Torah

crusades attempts by Christians of western Europe to recapture the Holy Land by force

culture heroes beings in mythic time who originated important aspects of cultural life

dakhma Tower of Silence in Zoroastrian communities, the structure on which the dead are exposed to vultures and the sun

Dar al-Harb *see* Dar al-Islam

Dar al-Islam "abode of Islam"; territories of the ummah under Muslim control, whereas the rest of the world is the Dar al-Harb, "abode of warfare"

da'wah missionary activities directed toward spreading Islam

Deep Ecology contemporary movement emphasizing a sacred sense of human interconnectedness with all the natural world

denomination church organization consisting of a number of congregations, having autonomous structure and usually distinctive teachings, especially within Protestantism

dhikr "remembrance"; spiritual exercises in Sufism focusing the consciousness on God

diaspora the dispersion of Jews away from the Jewish homeland, to live as minorities in other lands

dietary law Jewish laws pertaining to the proper preparation and eating of food, and the avoidance of certain animal food; *see* kashrut

divine kingship notion in many ancient societies, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, that the king represents divine power to the human realm

Djanggawul Australian culture heroes who created the present world in their wanderings in the Dreaming Time

Docetism teaching by some in the early church that Christ only appeared to be human; this teaching eventually was rejected by church councils

Dogon people living in Mali in Africa

Dreaming Time mythic time of the beginnings in Australian aborigine tradition

druj "lie," upheld by Angra Mainyu and the other evil beings, according to Zoroastrian thought

earth-diver myth story of the creation of the world in which an animal dove into the sea to bring up the first mass of earth, as among the Iroquois

Easter festival celebrating the resurrection of Christ

Ecofeminism contemporary movement that identifies patriarchal values as the cause of the ecological crisis and proposes ecological wholeness through feminist values

ecumenical movement modern movement to achieve understanding, cooperation, and some form of unity between the various branches of Christianity

emergence myth story of original people emerging from lower worlds into the present world, as among the Navajo

Ennead the group of nine gods headed by the creator Atum, worshiped at Heliopolis in ancient Egypt

Enuma Elish epic of creation in ancient Babylon, read during the new year's festival

Epiphany season after Christmas emphasizing the "showing forth" of Christ to the world; some Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate the nativity of Christ during this time

eschatology doctrine about the last things: the end of the world, judgment day, consummation of God's plan

Essenes ascetic Jewish movement around the Dead Sea area from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E.

ethics thought and study about moral decisions on the basis of traditions of right and wrong

Eucharist principal Christian sacrament, using bread and wine as a reenactment or remembrance of Christ's last supper; also called Mass, Lord's Supper, Divine Liturgy, and Holy Communion

Exile the Jewish captivity in Babylon, especially the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. until the first return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C.E.

Exodus deliverance of Israelites from Egypt under Moses' leadership

Feast of the Nativity celebration of the birthday of Jesus; Christians of the Western churches celebrate this on December 25, while some Eastern Orthodox Christians observe this feast on January 6

Feminist Spirituality Movement contemporary movement in many religious traditions emphasizing feminine aspects of the sacred and a recovery of feminine values in spiritual practices and in human relationships

Fire Temple main worship sanctuary for Zoroastrians, where the sacred fire is kept burning

Five Pillars required Muslim rituals of serving God: Shahadah (confession), Salat (prayer), Zakat (alms-giving), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage)

Fundamentalism in Christianity, a movement by conservative Protestants to reject modernity in Christianity, advocating the literal inerrancy of scripture and strict adherence to traditional doctrine and morality

Gathas sacred hymns composed by Zarathustra, part of the *Avesta*

Gemara comments on the *Mishnah*; added to the *Mishnah* to form the Jewish Talmud

ghetto special Jewish quarter in certain European cities

Ghost Dance native revival movement among many Native American peoples in the latter part of the nineteenth century

Gilgamesh epic Mesopotamian epic about a hero who searches for immortality but fails; includes a great flood story

Gnosticism movement in the Hellenistic world that emphasized a special secret knowledge about God and the world, holding to a dualism of spirit and matter

gospels writings compiled in the early church proclaiming the story of Jesus' life and death; the four canonical gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

grace theological term meaning reception of spiritual goals as given by God rather than attained by one's own effort

great commission commission given by Christ to his disciples to go and "make disciples" of all nations

great Goddesses feminine sacred beings, source of life and power, worshiped at least as early as the Upper Paleolithic period (starting ca. 35,000 B.C.E.)

Hadith a saying or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad transmitted through a trustworthy chain of reporters; the collection of hadiths

Hagar wife of Abraham, mother of Ishmael, and ancestress of the Muslims

Hainuwele culture hero in Wemale tradition (Ceram Island in Indonesia) from whose body tuberous plants grew

Hajj annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca

Halakhah Jewish legal tradition based on the Talmud

Hanukkah Jewish festival of lights in December, celebrating rededication of the temple in Maccabean times

haram in Judaism, forbidden, such as certain actions or food

Hasidim popular mystical and devotional Jewish movement beginning in the seventeenth century in eastern Europe

healing rituals religious rituals devoted to promoting health, often complementary to modern medical practices

Hebrews ancestors of the Israelites

hidden imam in Shi'ism, the last Imam (successor to Muhammad) who disappeared into a state of occultation and will return in the future

Hijra emigration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.

Holocaust ancient Israelite ritual meaning "all-consuming sacrificial fire," used in modern times to denote the destruction of Jews and others under the Nazis

Holy Immortals *see* Amesha Spentas

Homo erectus human species about 500,000 years ago; lived in communities, had many stone tools, and engaged in cooperative hunts

Homo sapiens sapiens modern human species, dating back to Upper Paleolithic period

Hopi Native Americans of southwestern North America

hunters and gatherers peoples who live by hunting and gathering, whose religious ideas are especially associated with animal life

Husayn son of 'Ali, killed at Karbalah (680); considered by Shi'ites as an Imam (successor to the Prophet Muhammad) and a great martyr

'id "feast" or festival in Islam; the two major festivals are 'Id al-adha (Feast of Sacrifice) during the Hajj month and 'Id al-fitr (Feast of Breaking the Ramadan Fast)

ihram state of ritual purity and consecration appropriate for entering the sacred precincts of Mecca on the Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage)

ijma' "consensus"; for formulating Muslim law, consensus among the legal scholars is necessary

ijtihad independent legal reasoning in Islam; one who does this is a mujtahid

imam Islamic scholar and leader, especially in ritual prayer; for Shi'ites, the proper successors to the Prophet are called Imams

iman "faith," complete certitude about the truth of Islam

incarnation "becoming flesh"; especially the Christian teaching that the eternal Son of God became human in the womb of his mother Mary

Indo-Europeans groups of pastoralist peoples who migrated from the steppes of Asia and founded ancient civilizations in Europe, Persia, and India

International Society for Krishna Consciousness new religious movement, founded by Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896–1977), drawing on traditional Hindu practices of worshiping Krishna as the supreme manifestation of the divine; known as ISKCON, this movement has drawn many Westerners as devotees

Ishmael son of Abraham and Hagar, ancestor of the Muslims

isnad the chain of transmitters for a particular hadith in Islam

Israel "he strives with God"; name given to Jacob and thereafter to the covenant people; name of modern Jewish state

Jehovah's Witnesses Christian movement arising in America, teaching strict literal understanding of biblical ideas and holding firmly to distinctive views such as pacifism, refusal to accept blood transfusions, and others

jihad "striving" for religious perfection and for God's cause including bearing arms in defense of Islam if necessary

Judgment Day the day on which God will judge all according to their deeds

justification by faith doctrine that justification before God comes by faith, not by good works; a central emphasis of Martin Luther

Ka'bah the cube-shaped stone shrine in the Great Mosque at Mecca, focal point of prayer and pilgrimage for Muslims

Kabbalah "tradition," especially the medieval mystical Jewish tradition, of which the *Zohar* is a central text

kafir an unbeliever, in Islamic terms

Karaites Jewish sect that rejected oral Torah (Talmud), relying on scripture alone

kashrut ritual fitness, suitable for use according to Jewish law; applies especially to dietary laws, what foods can and cannot be eaten, and how to prepare them

kenosis "emptying out"; in ritual, the movement of separation or doing away with the old state; *see* plerosis

Khadija the first wife (d. 619) of the Prophet Muhammad

Kharijites "seceders"; strict moralistic sect of early Muslims

Kingdom of God the rule of God; proclaimed by Jesus as a present reality, yet to be fully manifested in the future

kusti long sacred cord given to a young Zoroastrian boy or girl at the initiation ritual (Naojote), to be wrapped around the waist in daily rituals

Lent Christian season of penitence in preparation for the Easter celebration

liminal in ritual, the state between separation (kenosis) and restoration (plerosis)

liturgy order of prayer, scripture reading, hymns, and exhortations followed in a worship service

Lugbara a people of East Africa

maat ideal of justice and order in ancient Egypt

magic attempt to control forces of nature through rituals and incantations

Maimonides great medieval Jewish philosopher (1135–1204 C.E.)

mana Melanesian word describing the state in which people, places, or objects are especially filled with sacred power

Marduk god of ancient Babylon city-state

Marranos Spanish Jews who were outwardly Christianized but many of whom secretly continued Jewish tradition

Masada mountain fortress near the Dead Sea where Jewish Zealots made a last stand against the Romans

mass Roman Catholic term for the Eucharistic service

master or **mistress of animals** divine being, often a prototype of the herd of animals, who protects the herd and also provides boons for humans

Mendelssohn, Moses Jewish Enlightenment thinker (1729–1786)

Messiah end-time king, descended from King David, expected to redeem Israel; Christians identified the Messiah (Greek *christos*) with Jesus

mihrab niche in the mosque wall indicating the direction to Mecca

minbar pulpit from which the sermon is given during the Friday prayer in the Islamic mosque

Mishnah code of Jewish oral law compiled ca. 200 C.E. by Judah the Prince; *see* Talmud

Mithra one of the Zoroastrian Yazata, guardian of light and giver of wealth, widely worshiped in the Roman Empire

mitzvot in Judaism, commandments given by God

mobed Zoroastrian priest

monasticism the way of life of monks and nuns, usually celibate, without personal possessions, and dedicated to meditation, prayer, study, and service

monism view that all reality is one unified divine reality

monotheism belief in one almighty God, separate from the world

Mormonism new religious movement founded in America by Joseph Smith (1805–1844) on the basis of the Book of Mormon, known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, with headquarters in Utah; another smaller group, based in Independence, Missouri, is the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

Moses leader of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt and the founding of the covenant on Mt. Sinai

mosque (masjid) place of communal worship in Islam

muezzin (muadhdhin) person who calls the people to ritual prayer, chanting out the call from atop a minaret or mosque roof

Mughal Muslim dynasty established by the Mongols in India

mulla Persian word for learned Muslim teacher and expounder of the law

Muslim one who has surrendered to God in accepting the authority of the Quran

Mu'tazilites school in the classical period of Islam that accepted reason as a primary criterion for establishing beliefs

mysteries secret ritual cults in ancient Greece in which initiates could experience union with a god and promise of life after death

myth story about sacred beings in the beginning time, telling how existence came to be as it is and providing the pattern for authentic life

Naojote the ritual of initiation for young Zoroastrian boys and girls, in which they are invested with the sacred shirt and sacred cord (kusti)

Navajo Native American people of southwestern North America

Ndembu people living in Zambia in Central Africa

Neanderthal human species ca. 100,000 to 35,000 years ago, with clear archaeological evidence of religious activities

Neo-Pagans broad new religious movement emphasizing nature spirituality on the basis of pre-Christian traditions about gods, goddesses, and sacred nature, including various groups such as Druids, witches, goddess-worshipers, and more

Neolithic period beginning after the last ice age (ca. 10,000 years ago) when planting was discovered and villages and cities founded

New Age Movement very broad term sometimes used to identify the religious subculture that emphasizes personal transformation and growth through spiritual techniques such as channeling, planetary consciousness, shamanism, astrology, use of crystals, and much more

New Year's festival important annual festival in many societies, a time of purging out the old year and bringing renewal

Ngaju Dayak agricultural people living in Kalimantan, Indonesia

Nicene Creed doctrinal formulation from the Council of Nicea, setting forth the orthodox understanding of the Trinity

nondualism view that ultimate reality and the phenomenal world are not different

Old Testament Christian designation for the Hebrew scriptures

Olorun supreme god among the Yoruba

Olympian gods powerful gods of ancient Greece thought to rule from Mt. Olympus

original sin Christian teaching that all humans share a basic condition of sinfulness

orisa divinities in Yoruba belief that control life in the world

Orthodox Church term referring to the historic Eastern Christian churches, including the Greek, Russian, Armenian, and other traditions

Orthodox Judaism modern movement continuing a strict traditional belief in the binding character of the Torah and Halakhah

Osiris god of the dead in ancient Egypt, important for the afterlife

Ottoman caliphate ruling much of the Muslim world from Istanbul from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries C.E.

Paleolithic Old Stone Age; in the Upper Paleolithic period (ca. 35,000 to 10,000 years ago) the modern species of *Homo sapiens sapiens* appeared

parables stories by which Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom of God

Parsis communities of Zoroastrians in India

passion story the climax of each of the four Gospels, telling of the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus

pastoralists (herders) peoples who have domesticated animals such as sheep or cattle and have religious ideas associated especially with their herds

path of transformation practice in a religious tradition that changes one from the wrong or inadequate state to the ideal state

Paul leading apostle who brought the gospel of Christ to non-Jews and whose letters form part of the New Testament

Pentecost festival approximately seven weeks after Easter, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early Christians

Pesach (Passover) spring Jewish festival commemorating deliverance from Egypt

peyote religion modern Native American revival movement, called the Native American Church, with ceremonial use of peyote (small hallucinogenic cactus)

Pharisees party in ancient Judaism teaching the oral Torah along with the written Torah, resurrection of the body, and application of the law in everyday life

philosophy humanistic, rational thinking that developed in many traditions, notably in ancient Greece

pietism in Christianity, a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, emphasizing the experience of God's grace and emotional dedication

plan of salvation God's design for the salvation of the world, foretold through prophets and accomplished through Jesus Christ

planters peoples who cultivate plants for food and have religious ideas associated especially with vegetation and the fertility of the earth

plerosis "filling up"; fulfillment or restoration movement of ritual; *see* kenosis

polytheism belief that many divine powers share in the world's operation

prehistorical before written records

prophets inspired people who spoke God's word and advocated reforms in Israel, especially from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C.E.; recorded words of individual prophets became part of the sacred scripture

prophets messengers through whom God has given revelation to all peoples, culminating with Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets

Protestantism broad designation for the main churches of the Reformation

Purim early spring festival remembering events of the Book of Esther

qiyas "analogy" in legal argumentation and decision making in Islam

Quran "recitation," primarily the revelation sent down by God upon the Prophet Muhammad; the Holy Book

rabbi "my master"; title for teacher of the law; spiritual leader of a congregation in Judaism

Rabbinic Judaism designation for Judaism as it developed under the teachers of the oral Torah (Talmud)

Ramadan sacred month in which Muslims perform the Fast

Reconstructionist Judaism modern movement founded by Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1982), emphasizing Judaism as a civilization

Reform Judaism modern movement attempting to conform tradition to conditions of modern life, allowing changes in the Halakhah

Reformation reform movements in the Christian church, especially the reform of the European church through the work of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others

religious traditions sacred stories and basic ideas and practices that religious communities "hand over" from generation to generation; that which is handed over (Latin *traditio*) is thought to maintain a recognizable unity even while changing over time

resurrection rising from the dead; in Christian belief, Christ's resurrection as the first fruit of the resurrection of all at the end of the world

rites of passage rituals connected with the critical changes or passages in a person's life, especially birth, puberty, marriage, and death

rituals activities of many kinds that connect people with sacred realities, including prayer, sacrifice, chanting, pilgrimage, festivals, disciplines of meditation, and much more

Roman Catholic Church the historic Western church as it has continued under the leadership of the pope, the bishop of Rome

Rosh Hashanah Jewish New Year, first day of Tishri (usually in September); beginning of High Holy Days (which include Yom Kippur)

Sabbath seventh day of the week, sacred day of rest and study for Jews

sacraments in Christianity, rituals that convey God's grace, such as baptism and the Eucharist

sacred space space that is made special by connection with the sacred, providing orientation and rootedness for a people

sacred story master story of a religion, providing identity for the adherents; *see* myth

sacred time special time of ritual and festival, when mythic events are made present once more

sacred, the what is experienced as ultimate reality, the mysterious Other that is the ground of ultimate value and meaning

Sadducees conservative party of temple priests and sympathizers in ancient Judaism who rejected the oral Torah and the idea of the resurrection

Safavid Muslim dynasty in Iran beginning in the sixteenth century, featuring rule by the shahs

Salat required Muslim ritual of prayer five times daily

sandpainting ceremonial art used in healing rituals, notably among the Navajo

Sawm required Muslim fasting during the month of Ramadan

Scientology new religious movement founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), emphasizing scientific-type techniques to remove mental and physical disorders and bring spiritual transformation

Self-Realization Fellowship modern religious movement founded in America by Yogananda (1893–1952), teaching various Hindu yogic practices

Shahadah the Muslim formula bearing witness to the unity of God: "I testify that there is no God but God; I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God"

shaman, shamaness person who undergoes special training and can go into trances, communicate with the spiritual world, and bring healing and special benefits

Shari'ah Islamic law, based on the Quran and on the sunnah of the Prophet

Shavuot Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), commemorating the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai

Shema statement proclaiming the unity of God, based on Deuteronomy 6:4–9, beginning, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"

Shi'ites the "faction" of 'Ali that believes that 'Ali and his descendants are the proper successors of the Prophet Muhammad; today, one of the two main divisions in Islam, representing about one-sixth of the world's Muslims

shirk "association"; Muslim term for the great sin of idolatry or associating something else with God

soteriology theory of salvation through Jesus Christ

Spenta Mainyu Holy Spirit in Zoroastrianism, closely identified with Ahura Mazda, creator of world, opponent of Angra Mainyu

Spiritualism broad religious movement begun in America in the 1840s, focused on methods of communicating with spirits of the dead; some groups are organized as Spiritualist churches

Sufi one who follows the mystical path of Islam

Sukkot in Judaism, Feast of Booths, autumn harvest festival

Sun Dance traditional festival of Plains tribes of music, dance, and sacrifice to bring renewal, practiced today by many tribes

sun-god divine being manifested through the sun, important especially in ancient Egypt

sunnah "custom" or "way of acting," primarily of the Prophet Muhammad; the Prophet's sunnah is known through the hadiths

Sunnites term for the Muslim majority, those who acknowledge the first four caliphs and the interpretation of the Quran and the Prophet's sunnah by the orthodox 'ulama (religious scholars)

supreme god the divine being with final authority, usually the creator, often associated with the sky

sweat lodge special lodge among some Native Americans constructed for purification ceremonies

symbols words, pictures, ideas, rituals, and so on that evoke deep meanings by connecting with sacred reality

synagogue Greek term translating Hebrew "house of assembly"; Jewish place for prayer and study

tabu Polynesian word indicating someone or something is full of sacred power in a volatile, contagious (and, therefore, potentially harmful) way

Talmud Jewish "oral Torah," comprised of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*; exists in a Palestinian and a Babylonian version

Tanakh Hebrew scriptures comprised of *Torah* (the Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Khetuvim* (the Writings)

tawhid Muslim term for maintaining the unity of God

theology thinking about God and God's work

Theosophy new religious movement founded in America by Madame Helena Blavasky (1831–1891) and Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), integrating Hindu

and Buddhism ideas with notions of communicating with higher spiritual masters

Torah first five books in the Hebrew scriptures; also the whole of scripture; also the whole corpus of revelation, including oral Torah

Tower of Silence *see* dakhma

Transcendental Meditation Hindu meditation movement founded in America by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (b. 1917), emphasizing simple meditation techniques for practical benefits

transformation the act of reaching the ideal state of wholeness, perfection, or salvation

Trinity in Christianity, the doctrine that the one God is revealed in three "persons"—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Twelvers the largest group within the Muslim Shi'ites, those who hold there have been twelve Imams; also called the Imamis

'ulama the class of learned Muslim legal scholars who study and apply the religious sciences

'Umar the second caliph in Islamic history (d. 644)

Umayyad dynasty ruling Islam from Damascus from 661 to 750 C.E.

ummah a community having a common religion; especially the Muslim community

understanding "standing under" another's way of thought and life, comprehending it by reference to one's own experience

Unification Church new religious movement founded in Korea by Rev. Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920), based on Christian ideas but teaching a new Messiah to form the ideal human family

'Uthman the third caliph in Islamic history (d. 656)

vision quest Native American tradition involving individual purification and several days of fasting and praying in a remote sacred place to attain spiritual powers and direction for life

Wahhabi strict reform movement founded in Arabia in the eighteenth century and influential throughout Islam

Wicca one of the Neo-Pagan new religious movements, emphasizing traditions of witchcraft as nature spirituality, focused on the powers of goddesses and gods of nature

worship respectful ritual activity in special times, directed toward sacred beings or realities of ultimate value

Yahweh special covenant name of Israel's God as it was probably pronounced; written YHWH in the Hebrew scriptures; at a certain point Jews stopped pronouncing this sacred name and substituted the name Adonai

Yazata worshipful ones, Indo-Iranian gods who continued to be objects of worship in Zoroastrianism, sometimes called angels

Yom Kippur Jewish Day of Atonement on the tenth of Tishri, a solemn day of repentance

Yoruba a tribal people living in Nigeria

Zakat the required Muslim practice of alms-giving or wealth-sharing

Zarathustra the founder of Zoroastrianism, who lived perhaps around 1000 B.C.E., reformed the Indo-Aryan religion, and composed the Gathas

Zealots Jewish religious party in the Roman period that advocated resistance to Roman occupation

Zeus sovereign over the Olympian gods in ancient Greece

Zionism modern movement to secure a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which led to the formation of the state of Israel

Zionist churches independent Christian groups in Africa that have attempted to combine African traditions with Christianity

Zoroaster Greek form of the name Zarathustra